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1880 — 1905  
BY J·M·KENNEDY

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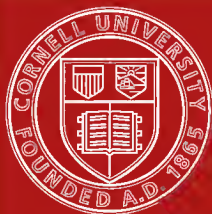
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# ENGLISH LITERATURE





# ENGLISH LITERATURE

1880—1905

BY J. M. KENNEDY



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TORY DEMOCRACY

RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHIES OF  
THE EAST

THE QUINTESSENCE OF NIETZSCHE

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# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY—CLASSICISM AND ROMANTICISM

MELANCHOLY is the keynote of the last generation of English literature, the period beginning about 1880 and ending, let us say, about 1905. Artistic impotence and artistic philistinism exercise even separately a melancholy effect; but, taken together, the effect they bring about is lamentable. The mere title given to one of the most typical productions of this period, *The Yellow Book*, is startlingly apt. The whole atmosphere of the time is yellow, jaundiced. Weakness of will is a prominent characteristic of those who, had they been stronger in this respect, might have rescued the literature of the age from the mire into which it was gradually sinking. But the period required stronger men to grapple with it.

It is, indeed, only too true that the age

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exercises an enormous influence even over creative artists. Only the very strongest of natures can overcome it. Had men like Wilde, Dowson, and Lionel Johnson been born at the time of the Renaissance, or in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, they would quite conceivably have lived to rank on the same plane as writers like Tasso and Pascal ; for the periods just mentioned were, on the whole, favourable to the development of literary genius. But the last thirty years of the nineteenth century were gloomy all over Europe, and nowhere more than in England. The age is not only marked by a number of literary tragedies—for it is a literary tragedy when good work goes wrong, as in the case of Wilde's later books. The age is distinguished by tragedies, in the purely physical sense of the term, among men of letters and artists. Crackanthorpe, Adams, Laurence Hope, John Davidson, and St. John Hankin deliberately took their lives. Charles Conder died insane. Over-indulgence in drink led to the premature deaths, in deplorable circumstances, of Lionel Johnson and Ernest Dowson. And this list could be extended.

Why, then, should the period have been so

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melancholy? Why did it drive so many representative writers to suicide in order that they might escape its horrors; why should it have driven others to drink and drugs, and a few to the lunatic asylum? In an interesting little book on the artistic movement of the nineties Mr. Blaikie Murdoch suggests that the sixties "had forged an art of muscles, but the nineties produced an art of nerves"; hence he attributes to the nineties greater subtlety and greater delicacy. This, however, does not take us much further. Why should the sixties have been muscular and the nineties delicate? Why should the writers of the period just preceding the eighties and nineties have been cheerful, and the writers immediately following them afflicted with the blackest of despair? Swinburne is cheerful; for he appeared to find consolation in Hellenism, or in what he regarded as Hellenism. Tennyson is cheerful; young Hallam rests in the Lord. And who could be more robust, or more philistine, than Browning, with his "Take what is, trust what may be—that's Life's true lesson—eh?"?

Religion and Hellenism, then, but chiefly religion, were the mainstays of creative artists up to the eighties. In the eighties and

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nineties, however, religion had lost its influence, and Hellenism was misunderstood. Faith was lacking; and it did not reappear until early in the twentieth century, let us say about 1905. The artists of the period from 1880 to 1905 were caught in a torrent of materialism, atheism, idealism, and romanticism: four phenomena which almost always go together, and which only the strongest of strong characters can combat.

Atheism in the first place means that the reason has superseded the imagination; but all creative literature depends upon the exercise of the imagination, the vision; and not at all upon the reason. The glorious mythologies of Greece and India may be adequately explained away by the reason; and small thanks to it for its pains in doing so. But by no amount of reasoning could these mythologies have been built up. For this the imagination was necessary. If, then, we find a period in history, such as the Augustan Age in Rome or the Renaissance in modern Europe, when the imagination ranks higher than the reason, we may safely predict that such a period will be fruitful in creative literature—in creative art, in fact, of all kinds. If, on the other



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hand, we find a period, such as the Alexandrian age, when people use their reason more than their imagination, we may say with equal certainty that such a period will be noted, not for creative literature, which will be practically non-existent, but for scientific research and the more mechanical sides of literary work, such as the writing of commentaries upon the productions of classic authors, or the uninspired discussion and interpretation of works which it is no longer felt possible to emulate. If the scientific researches undertaken during or just previously to such a period have a tendency to discredit the imagination, then so much the worse for those who are born into that period with an innate impulse for creative work.

Nothing spiritual can exist for long without some philosophic basis. That basis may be the Christian religion, as was the case in England, generally speaking, up to the latter part of the nineteenth century. Or it may be Hegel, or Plato, or Nietzsche, or merely a frank hedonism. The philosophical states represented by these names are so many foundations upon which men will naturally take up their stand in accordance with their tendencies. Some of these philosophies are likely to promote creative work ;

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others are as likely to retard it. When they are one and all examined, it will be found they must in the end belong to one of two categories : either they rely upon the reason or they rely upon the imagination. When we find writers express a liking for one or other of these philosophies, or when we find them influenced by strong believers in these philosophies, we can generally tell what the artistic fate of such writers will be.

Now, it is important to note that the philosophies most in vogue during the eighties and nineties were those that tended to set the reason above the imagination ; and literature suffered accordingly. The writer who, more than any one else, influenced the literary movement of the eighties, was Walter Pater, and Pater himself was dominated from beginning to end by the literary influence of Ruskin and by the philosophy of Plato. [And what effect this philosophy had on his work may be easily seen by any one who can appreciate the pernicious influence of romanticism on literary endeavour, as opposed to the classicism which it is the duty of every cultured writer to uphold.]

Before we go on, however, we must come to an understanding regarding the use of the

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words classicism and romanticism, which are now, like so many other terms, in danger of being abused by careless thinkers. When we speak of classic work we mean, or should mean, work modelled on the style of the best Greek and Latin authors: works in which the ideas expressed are correctly moulded to the form of their expression, in which the thoughts are clearly and simply outlined, and in which certain definite artistic canons are strictly adhered to. We must follow not merely the letter of the ancients—for we shall attain no particular end if we do—but their spirit; we must definitely assume that the spirit of the Greek and Latin authors is our highest literary ideal.

To those who object to the classics on various grounds—the most common objection at the present day being that they are “out of date” or not “practical” or “useful” in the struggle for existence—it can only be answered that such objections, or rather excuses, are insufficient. Through most of our western European literature we find a definite tradition, a high standard which was laid down by the writers of the two ancient States. It has been the aim of the best authors in every period to carry on this tradition; and, in

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spite of numerous apparent contradictions and waverings, there have been men in every age who did aim at the high ideal which came down to us from classic times.

On the other hand, this ideal has often been opposed and scoffed at. It has been opposed by those men who played the part in literature that Liberalism has done in politics: men who saw nothing in the influence of tradition in art or literature, who acted as if the world were re-created from day to day and year to year, who chafed under the artistic discipline to which their opponents, the classicists, willingly submitted. These were the men, too, who desired free play for "individuality," who thought that every author was quite right in laying down his own artistic canons; the men who experimented with curious metric forms, and who could not understand that their work was of necessity related to the work of previous writers and to the work of the writers who would follow them. These were the men, again, who rushed into the opposite extreme as regards style. Their ideas were not expressed with the simplicity of diction that characterised the authors who followed classic models. In their works we find puny thoughts

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enveloped in mystic, florid, symbolic language. In accordance with the rest of their character, their ideals are not classic ideals: they are what we moderns call "cloudy" in their conceptions of the world and of life, though the ancients would probably have given a harsher name to this characteristic of theirs. This latter class constitutes the romanticists.

The first general use of the word "romanticist" is found in connection with a German school of writers which flourished towards the latter part of the eighteenth century. It included, to mention only three of the best-known names, Tieck, F. Schlegel, and Novalis. These writers did not seek their inspiration in classical sources; the origin of such inspiration as they could claim was pointed out unerringly by Heinrich Heine. They delved into the works of mediæval chroniclers and "romance" writers; the very writers who, of all others, are most distinguished by their failure to appreciate the classics, the chroniclers of chivalric incidents and the romantico-chivalric spirit, a spirit which was not assailed throughout Europe until Cervantes annihilated it once and for all in one of the most powerful of satires. This German revolt against the classics,

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typified in the works of the authors already referred to, was nominally directed against what they were pleased to call the "pedantry" of the French poetry of the eighteenth century and the latter part of the seventeenth, as typified, say, in Corneille, Racine, and Boileau. But, in being directed as it was against these great representatives of the classic tradition, it struck at the roots of all true literary ideals. The models handed down to us by Rome and Greece were abandoned for models handed down to us by the Middle Ages.

Now, what particularly distinguishes the mediæval romances is the sentimentality and idealism of their substance and the florid style in which their substance is enveloped. Such stories as the *Amadis of Gaul*, or tales like the *Gesta Romanorum*, may undoubtedly be found interesting by many readers. From an historical point of view, for example, they throw considerable light on the manners and customs of the periods in which they were written. But by the artistic mind they can never be regarded as artistic productions. Their lack of unity, indifferent ideas, and bad style are not atoned for by whatever merits they possess for the historian or the sociologist.

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And, while these traits are particularly characteristic of mediæval romances, other branches of literature caught the infection and likewise show a distinct non-classical tendency. Take a number of writers at haphazard: John Donne, Plautus, Góngora, George Herbert, Calderón, Milton, Ovid, Racine, Boiardo, and Theocritus, all of whom are recognised to be great literary masters. Yet even an unobservant critic, if such a contradiction in terms may be allowed to pass, can hardly fail to notice the enormous difference in the spirit of these writers. Compare, for example, Calderón with Plautus. As Heine very properly remarks: "The poetry of the Middle Ages is most clearly characterised by Calderón, and in its two main impulses: chivalry and monasticism. The pious comedies of the Castilian poet-priest, whose poetical fancies were ecclesiastically fumigated and sprinkled with holy water, were now imitated in Germany in all their sacred *grandezza*, all their sacerdotal luxury, all their exalted foolishness; and there arose among us a varicoloured, extravagantly-profound school of poetry with which people became mystically infatuated."\*

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\* H. Heine: *Die Romantische Schule*, Bk. i.

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In Plautus, on the other hand, we have a dramatist who is, it is true, a rough diamond ; but who nevertheless always keeps in mind certain well-understood literary traditions. One has only to compare the form and spirit of his *Miles Gloriosus* with Calderón's *La Vida es Sueño* to observe the enormous difference between classicism and romanticism. A comparison in a like sense of Boiardo with Theocritus, of Donne with Ovid, of George Herbert with Racine, of Góngora with Milton, cannot but impress even a careless student in an equal degree. Again, in the famous *Nuptial Song* of Catullus there is a typically pure and simple classical passage on a flower :

Ut flos in saeptis secretus nascitur hortis,  
Ignotus pecori, nullo convolsus aratro,  
Quem mulcent aurae, firmat sol, educat imber :  
Multi illum pueri, multae optavere puellae ;  
Idem cum tenui carptus defloruit ungui,  
Nulli illum pueri, nullae optavere puellae :  
Sic virgo, dum intacta manet, dum cara suis est;  
Cum castum amisit polluto corpore florem,  
Nec pueris iocunda manet, nec cara puellis.

So beautiful a passage would naturally be repeatedly imitated, and this is what it becomes in the florid language of Tasso :

Deh mira (egli cantò) spuntar là rosa  
Dal verde suo modesta e verginella,



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Che mezzo aperta ancora e mezzo ascosa ;  
Quanto si mostra men, tanto è più bella.  
Ecco poi nudo il sen già baldanzosa  
Dispiega : ecco poi langue, e non par quella ;  
Quella non par, che desiata avanti  
Fu da mille donzelle, e mille amanti.

Così trapassa al trapassar d' un giorno,  
Della vita mortale il fiore e 'l verde :  
Nè perchè faccia indietro april ritorno,  
Si rinfiora ella mai nè si rinverde.  
Cogliam la rosa in sul mattino adorno  
Di questo dì che tosto il seren perde ;  
Cogliam d'Amor la rosa : amiamo or quando  
Esser si puote riamato amando.\*

Tasso, it will be seen, was familiar with the classics. He studied them, he imitated them ; and yet he could not grasp the spirit of these few simple lines of Catullus without enveloping them in a florid metaphor which was not meant to belong to them at all. Why ? Merely because Tasso had not lifted himself above his age, as Goethe and Heine did later on. He had not submitted himself to the discipline which a classical training necessarily presupposes ; he could not restrain those characteristics which he possessed in common with Calderón. The classic in his hands becomes the romantic, the simple becomes the fantastic. This is, in truth, what generally

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\* *La Gerusalemme Liberata*, Canto XVI.

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happens when the romanticist finds himself out of his depth ; and, if we wish for a musical analogy to this literary one, we shall find it in Wagner's compositions. The simple melody is enveloped in a gigantic maze of harmony to such an extent that the listener becomes confused, and remains so until he accustoms himself to the tricks of the magician.

In criticising mediæval romances it would, of course, be insufficient to say that they are not "true to nature" ; for it is not the duty of the artist—far from it—to reproduce nature with fidelity. But it is his duty to remember that he is living on earth and not in the clouds ; and this is exactly where the romance-writers fail. They fail because the very religion they profess teaches them to deny the primitive and most character-forming instincts of their species. They were afraid to perform the task of the artist, viz., to face reality and interpret it. They turned and fled from reality and constructed for themselves a new earth : an earth wherein the men and women differed as much from the men and women to whom we are accustomed as the *Ring of the Niebelungs* differs from *Carmen*. We find men and women adorned with virtues which have

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no parallel in real life, and losing themselves amidst grotesque clouds of idealistic fancies which have no parallel in the solar system.

The classics differ entirely from this. We cannot imagine Catullus or Horace inditing the kind of love-songs sung by the troubadours ; the thing is unthinkable. Despite what some critics refer to as the "freshness" of Philippe de Commines and Villehardouin, we cannot help regretting that the masterly mind of Thucydides could not have dealt with the Italian expedition of Charles VIII, or that the profound insight of Tacitus could not have still further immortalised itself by leaving us a few cutting character sketches of the leaders of the Fourth Crusade.

Such a vain wish is inspired by no mere whim. The classical authors would have been incapable of enveloping historical incidents in cloudy romantic ideals ; of distorting the characters of men to suit the theological views of the age. No classicist is ever afraid to face reality ; he says "yea" to life, to use Nietzsche's expression. This, of course, does not mean that he reproduces life with exquisite fidelity, which is the business of the colour-photographer. It does mean that, while the romanticist

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shrinks from reality, is afraid of reality, and surrounds reality with an exaggerated idealistic halo, the classicist faces reality and deals with it as the sculptor fashions his marble or the potter handles his clay—in other words, he re-creates reality.

It is nevertheless quite possible to be a romantic realist. Emile Zola, for example, as all readers of his novels must observe, takes unwearying pains to depict a scene with the utmost minuteness. The reader is not permitted to pass on from incident to incident until every trifling detail has been brought to his notice with almost pre-Raphaelite fidelity—those who have read *Lourdes* or *La Débâcle* will easily recollect instances of this characteristic. Such a determination to set reality on paper, however, is not a mark of the classicist. It does not indicate that Zola has mastered reality, but simply that reality has fascinated him as a snake fascinates a bird. He is overpowered by reality and finds himself unable to select, which is a preliminary requisite for the re-creation of reality as the task is performed by the true artist. Many of Mr. Shaw's long prefaces to his plays are almost Zolaesque in their detail, and quite

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as ineffective. Mr. Shaw, it is true, endeavours to do for the spiritual world what Zola has done for the physical world, and it may be thought that the comparison is ill-judged on that account. But I make the comparison because it seems to me that the error of both writers arises from the same source: their disregard of classicism and their firm adherence to romanticism.

We have seen, then, how the term romanticism arose, and to what school of German writers it was applied before its use became general among psychologists to designate the artistic traits of a certain weak type of mind. It should be further remembered that, as a result of the Napoleonic wars, a national support was given to the romantic movement in Germany. Writers of all kinds, all those who were looked upon as creative artists, had behind them the full sympathy of the populace when they refused to follow French literary models. The mass of the people knew little and cared less about high classical ideals in literature and art; but they could appreciate a defeat in battle. It mattered little to them—for who was there to point it out to them?—that Germany was a barbarous country as com-

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pared with France, that culture must come to them, if it came at all, from beyond the Rhine. These things were lost sight of at a time when both art and nationality were united on the side of philistinism.

Although it is true that Lessing had taken up the cudgels against French literature and the French drama, he should not on that account be numbered among the romanticists. He made strenuous endeavours, endeavours which resulted in his premature death, to show his fellow-authors that, if they did abandon French literature, they must replace it by the culture of the best ages of Greece and Rome. They did not do so. They immersed themselves, as Heine pointed out later with much bitterness of spirit, in the wells of mediæval poetry and romances ; and those who did turn to the literature of Greece and Rome did not trouble to find out—they were perhaps incapable of distinguishing—what were the best cultural epochs of the two States. They went back no further than the Alexandrian period of the second and third centuries of our era—to the very period, in other words, when that which we now call romanticism had taken a firm hold of what was left of Greek and

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Roman literature, a period when the influence of the neo-Platonists was predominant, a period when the real classical literature had degenerated almost beyond recognition. Readers of Nietzsche's essays, *We Philologists* and *On the Future of our Educational Institutions*, will well remember the scorn with which he reproaches his countrymen with neglecting the best and fastening with avidity on the worst that classical times had to offer. The Alexandrian age, indeed, can hardly properly be called classical at all: it was a period of transition between the abandonment of paganism and the first establishment of Christian thought—a period of transition, in other words, between classicism and romanticism, with the influence of romanticism growing stronger from year to year.

If we are called upon to indicate the main characteristic of this age, we may say at once that it was an age which was governed entirely by its neo-Platonist outlook, an age in which men were deeply engrossed in Platonic studies. It was, in consequence, an age which was entirely out of touch with reality, an age which was dominated by false ideals. For the Platonists were the Christians of antiquity.

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Although it is impossible to set Plato and Aristotle in juxtaposition at every point in their philosophies, we can certainly juxtapose them in this respect : Aristotle, like Nietzsche himself, had his feet firmly planted on the world in which we live, and his energies were, like Nietzsche's, directed towards improving the position of man in this world and helping him to re-interpret nature to this end. Plato, on the contrary, was always concerned with unreal worlds, and he has in consequence always been the mainstay of romanticists and idealists. At the present time, for instance, Germany is distinguished by the strength of its romantic movement and the setback which has been given to classicism, and this coincides—strangely enough, perhaps, to those who have not taken this effect of Plato into consideration—with a pronounced revival of Platonic studies there. Again, to go further back, the influence of Plato was predominant from the Alexandrian period down to the period immediately preceding the Renaissance, and with the Renaissance itself Plato's influence on the thought of the time gradually became less and less. Aristotle, on the other hand, came into prominence with Thomas Aquinas



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and was one of the chief classical authors studied from the beginning to the end of the period of the Renaissance. And, to take the movement with which we are directly concerned, the influence of Plato on Wilde would be apparent to any one acquainted with the works of both men, even if Wilde had not himself admitted it in *Intentions* and in the *De Profundis*.

There was one man, however, who strove to combat the romantic movement in modern Europe, and to check the influence of the Platonic spirit : and this was Goethe. There are few more fascinating studies than the character of this man ; for it is of profound interest not only to the literary historian but also to the psychologist. He represents at once the romanticist and the classicist, and an examination of his intellectual life would suffice to show the distinctions, both broad and minute, separating the one from the other. For such a detailed examination of Goethe this is, of course, not the place ; but a few indications may be given.

Every artist is distinguished by a superfine sensibility, a peculiar nervous condition, and the greater the genius, as a rule, the greater

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the sensitiveness. Dryden's old tag about great wits being near allied to madness was simply one way—a rough and approximate way—of describing a phenomenon which has been observed in all ages, though the psychologists of our own time would naturally divide madness into many different categories. The “crankiness” of the genius is, of course, merely the outcome of his extreme sensitiveness and his profound penetration into men and things. Such a sensitiveness is, as might be expected, more apparent in youth than in later years. This youthful period of inner tension—the Promethean period of the artist, as an Italian psychologist has aptly called it—results in one of two things: either the artist masters his sensitiveness and becomes what the psychologist calls mature, or his sensitiveness overpowers him and he does not reach artistic maturity at all. Every real artist must pass through this Promethean period. Those who master their sensitiveness at the end of such a period—the duration of which naturally varies in accordance with the character of the individual—become classicists; those who fail to do so remain romanticists. For a most important trait of the classicist, and one which

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cannot be overlooked, is his unity, the complete harmony existing between mind and body, his complete self-control and well-developed will power; while the romanticist is equally distinguished by lack of unity, lack of will, and a resultant disharmony of thought. More than this: such a disharmony, in the case of an unusually sensitive artist who is unable to control his emotions, will lead in many instances to mental and physical wreckage. We can find two such shipwrecked romanticists in our own literature, Cowper and Oscar Wilde. Cowper's frequent attacks of "insanity" are of considerable interest to the psychologist, but hardly more so than an investigation of the causes of the offence which led Wilde to Wandsworth Prison and Reading Gaol.

It is significant of the whole romantic movement in Germany and England that the artists of the time could not control themselves. From a purely artistic standpoint it is painful to examine the spiritual lives of men like Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, the Schlegels, Tieck, Kotzebue, and Kleist. We are always aware of this want of spiritual harmony, this chaos of undisciplined emotions: it is like listening to a badly-played tune on a badly-tuned

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piano. There were men among the romanticists, notably Byron and Schiller, who did succeed in mastering themselves to some extent and taking a pace or two towards classical ideals; but fortunately there was one man—Goethe—who mastered himself completely, and developed an almost Olympic classicism out of his romanticism.

As a young man Goethe experienced the full force of that inward battle which makes or mars the artist. If we had not direct testimony regarding him to this effect, we could easily deduce it from his works themselves. Compare, for example, the romantic *Goetz*, which he wrote when he was twenty-two and recast when he was twenty-four, with the *Hermann und Dorothea*, written when he was nearly fifty; or compare the early romantic Werther novels with the later masterly psychological analysis which we know in English as *The Elective Affinities*. In all Goethe's important early works we observe the romantic influence; but we see that in his later works he has entirely shaken this influence off. His mind had gradually passed through its storm-and-stress period, and the complete artist emerged from the struggle.

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Goethe and Heine, however, were the only two poets of the time who conquered the romanticist within themselves, and they were less appreciated abroad than their romantic competitors and detractors. Goethe, the more classic of the two, was unable to stem the romantic tide which began in France with Lamartine and Victor Hugo, both of whom, together with Alfred de Musset, exercised an enormous influence on French literature of the last century, an influence that gave rise in its turn to the still more decadent influence of Baudelaire and Verlaine. From these sources the slow poison of romanticism spread to England, where it was soon being absorbed. The times were, indeed, propitious enough; for in the nineteenth century England was dominated in politics, science, and literature by the "Liberal" trend of thought which is the customary accompaniment of romanticism.

When writing some time ago on the subject of Tory Democracy, I pointed out how political Liberalism was usually associated with idealism and romanticism; but it is worth adding that Liberalism, assuming the general thought of a particular period to be "Liberal," is also associated with a romantic influence on litera-

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ture. Liberalism is, in the first place, based on a combination of those philosophies which I have already referred to in this chapter as appealing to the reason rather than to the imagination, and in the second place it has always appealed in England, as a political system, to the middle classes, who are notorious as having invariably exhibited the least possible sympathy with classicists in any field of art. The essential principles of Locke and Rousseau, to take an example, may be found in Plato ; and it is largely Locke and Rousseau who are responsible for the principles underlying modern bourgeois democracy. It is interesting to note that the writers of the more romantic and idealistic books published in the nineteenth century, when they took any part in politics, usually ranged themselves on the Liberal side ; and it is also a matter of psychological notoriety that science itself became more and more democratised as the nineteenth century progressed.

A typically unsound idealist who will naturally occur to the reader is John Ruskin. Our present literary inquiry, however, does not concern Ruskin, who only indirectly influenced the revived romantic movement of the quarter-

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century beginning about 1880 ; but the writer who may be said to have initiated this movement was a man whose works show distinct traces of Ruskin's influence, viz., Walter Pater. The study of the last generation of English literature, then, begins with Pater.

## CHAPTER II

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REFERENCE has already been made to the Promethean period of the artist; but it is only the higher classes of artists who are acquainted at all with the struggle that is taking place within them. There are now no artists so classic that they think of romanticism merely with contempt and never feel themselves oppressed by romantic fancies—as Nietzsche has said, we all begin by being decadents. There are, however, many artists who are so romantic at the beginning that the higher ideals of classicism seldom come within their range of vision, and they follow the path of the romanticist from the beginning to the end with only an occasional tremor. To this latter class belong most of the English writers of the last generation. Crackanthorpe, W. B. Yeats, and Le Gallienne, for example, show themselves in their works to have been essentially romanticists at the very beginning,



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and such they continued to be. Those inward struggles which we see so well represented in Goethe were unknown to them. We shall therefore have more respect for those among these writers who, while continually displaying romantic influences and tendencies, nevertheless showed that they were not unaware of classicism, that they sought to achieve some higher aim than that which the average romanticist has in view. Five such men in this period stand out prominently: Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, John Davidson, Arthur Symons, and George Gissing. Of the five, Davidson probably approached most nearly to the classical ideal.

Pater himself influenced the literary movement of the eighties and nineties almost against his will; and his habits and general characteristics make him a curious and interesting study. Never at any time did he advance extravagant claims in his own behalf, whatever may be said of the claims put forward in his behalf by his admirers. He was of a most retiring disposition, and avoided company. He did, it is true, make a certain number of literary and artistic acquaintances, including several of the pre-Raphaelites; but his extreme shyness prevented him from

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acquiring certain accomplishments which were indispensable to a critic in his position. For instance, he was never able to speak a foreign language, not even French. Although, therefore, he gives us many apt remarks on music, the music in words was beyond him. He spent many vacations in Germany with his sisters, but he never succeeded in being able to speak German. To the last he remained a typical Englishman in that he could converse only in his own language.

Not that Pater ever wished to converse much at all. Always unassuming and not over-talkative in the company of his friends, he was still more retiring in the presence of strangers. And Mr. Arthur Symons has told us what painful efforts it cost Pater to lecture on one occasion at Toynbee Hall: an effort which was painful not only to Pater but to those who had come to listen to him. Much of this sensitiveness may be explained by his own outlook on the world; or rather it explains his outlook on the world and his canons of taste. He expressed himself wonderfully well on this point in the remarkable essay which forms the "conclusion" to his *Studies in the Renaissance*: "The service of philosophy,

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of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. . . . Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening.”

It is worth noting the expression “intellectual excitement.” Physical excitement, indeed, is something which we can scarcely

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associate with Pater at all. He lived a hard, strictly intellectual existence. He avoided life as much as he avoided nature. He never undertook the highest task of the artist: the re-creation, the re-interpretation of nature for the benefit of man. He could not, so to speak, see large; he wanted something small which he could illuminate for an instant with his "gem-like flame." His *Studies in the Renaissance*, for example, do not attempt to deal with the Renaissance as a whole, as a phenomenon. They do not even attempt to give complete portraits of the men whose names stand as headings to the chapters. Pater's glance is concentrated on some one characteristic of the personages he deals with. The eventful life of Pico della Mirandola is barely alluded to; for in this essay Pater emphasises, as usual, some particular feature of the man: his endeavour to reconcile Christianity with the philosophy of ancient Greece. A similar concentration of Pater's critical faculties on one particular point is seen in most of the other essays: those on Botticelli and the poetry of Michelangelo, for example.

In the essay on Leonardo, however, we see

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the real Pater. There was indeed something in common between the two men. They exhibited similar traits, although Pater's might have been to Leonardo's "as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine." Leonardo's nature was haunted by ideals of beauty; he was absorbed in himself; he held aloof even from his friends. Pater seizes upon these characteristics and delineates them with infinite skill. Seldom indeed can we imagine him taking greater care of his phraseology and making the utmost endeavours to reach the art which conceals art. From the first to the last the essay is his masterpiece; and there is a celebrated passage in it which almost by itself explains Pater's own nature. I refer, of course, to the description of "La Gioconda," which, however often it may have been quoted before, well deserves to be quoted again:

"La Gioconda" is, in the truest sense, Leonardo's masterpiece, the revealing instance of his mode of thought and work. In suggestiveness, only the "Melancholia" of Dürer is comparable to it; and no crude symbolism disturbs the effect of its subdued and graceful mystery. We all know the face and hands of the figure, set in its marble chair, in that circle of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least. As often happens with works in which invention

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seems to reach its limit, there is an element in it given to, not invented by, the master. In that inestimable folio of drawings, once in the possession of Vasari, were certain designs of Verrocchio, faces of such impressive beauty that Leonardo in his boyhood copied them many times. It is hard not to connect with these designs of the elder, by-past master, as with its germinal principle, the unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it, which plays over all Leonardo's work. Besides, the picture is a portrait. From childhood we see the image defining itself on the fabric of his dreams ; and but for express historical testimony, we might fancy that this was but his ideal lady, embodied and beheld at last. What was the relationship of a living Florentine to this creature of his thought? By what strange affinities had the dream and the person grown up thus apart, and yet so close together? Present from the first incorporeally in Leonardo's brain, dimly traced in the designs of Verrocchio, she is found present at last in *Il Giocondo's* house. That there is much of mere portraiture in the picture is attested by the legend that by artificial means, the presence of mimes and flute-players, that subtle expression was protracted on the face. Again, was it in four years and by renewed labour never really completed, or in four months and as by stroke of magic, that the image was projected?

The presence that thus rose so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come," and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful

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women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the Middle Ages with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa stands as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea.

Here we have the truly characteristic Pater. When brought into contact with life and nature he is overwhelmed and seeks to escape; but when criticising a human production—a picture, a statue, a mediæval romance—he is in his element. The vague wistfulness of this celebrated picture has never been better described—

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not defined ; for after all the full sensation of beauty cannot be explained in words : but there is a peculiar charm, a fascination about "La Gioconda," as all who saw the picture in the Louvre before the carelessness of its custodians allowed it to be stolen will readily testify. This fascination has been magnificently expressed for us by Pater ; and it is difficult to think of any English writer, either before him or since, who could have done it so well.

It may be true, as has often been suggested, that Leonardo himself would have been among the first to deny that he<sup>\*</sup> ever intended to represent in the picture all that Pater saw in it. Pater himself hints ("there is an element in it given to, not invented by, the master") that we need not necessarily discover in a picture exactly what the artist himself intended to place there. As we shall see later, Oscar Wilde elaborated this thesis in one of his most brilliant essays, with special reference to Pater himself.

We see, then, what Pater's own peculiar aim is. He fastens his attention on one particular characteristic of a thing and illuminates it so strongly with his "gem-like flame" that he reinterprets it, gives it a new value, exercising, in short, creative criticism and proving



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Wilde's theory that criticism is a more difficult task than creation itself. While this trait is seen probably to the greatest extent in Pater's essay on Leonardo, we can see traces of it in the essay on Winckelmann. This great student and interpreter of Greek antiquity had some things in common with Pater, who heads his essay on him with the natural sentiment, "et ego in Arcadia fui." Winckelmann, however, was a man of much broader mind than Pater. His mastery of Greek art, using the word in its widest sense, is marvellous to us, even after a century of noted scholars, and of this Pater seems to have been well aware. He mentions with approval Goethe's reference to him and he even quotes Hegel on the subject: "Winckelmann, by contemplation of the ideal works of the ancients, received a sort of inspiration, through which he opened a new sense of the study of art. He is to be regarded as one of those who, in the sphere of art, have known how to initiate a new organ for the human spirit." We can almost discern Pater trembling with excitement between the words, as he goes on to comment upon this: "that it has given a new sense, that it has laid open a new organ, is the highest that can be said of any critical

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effort. It is interesting then to ask what kind of a man it was who thus laid open a new organ. Under what conditions was that effected ? ”

The main events in Winckelmann's life are, of course, known to all cultured Europe, but the more prominent of them seem to have additional interest when retold by Pater. In a few sentences he sums up the man's self-taught boyhood and youth, his intense anxiety to escape from the "crabbed Protestantism" of Germany, the bribe by means of which he succeeds in reaching Italy as a member of the Roman Church, his entry into Rome with volumes of Voltaire among his baggage. This religious sacrifice, which certainly brought Winckelmann into ill-repute at the time, is easily explained away by his English admirer, for in doing so Pater is obviously making an attempt to explain his own religious position :

The insincerity of his religious profession was only one incident of a culture in which the moral instinct, like the religious or political, was merged into the artistic. But then the artistic instinct was that, by desperate faithfulness to which Winckelmann was saved from a mediocrity, which, breaking through no bounds, moves ever in a bloodless routine and misses its one chance in the life of the spirit and the intellect. There have been instances of culture developed by every high motive in turn, and yet

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intense at every point ; and the aim of our culture should be to attain not only as intense but as complete a life as possible. But often the higher life is only possible at all, on condition of the selection of that in which one's motive is native and strong ; and this selection involves the renunciation of a crown reserved for others. Which is better ?—to lay open a new sense, to initiate a new organ for the human spirit, or to cultivate many types of perfection up to a point which leaves us still beyond the range of their transforming power ? Savonarola is one type of success ; Winckelmann is another : criticism can reject neither, because each is true to itself. Winckelmann himself explains the motive of his life when he says : “ It will be my highest reward, if posterity acknowledges that I have written worthily.”

Pater himself of course sought to open up a new organ ; but the work which he began was not carried to anything like a conclusion by himself. He laid down certain canons of æsthetic criticism and emphasised the cultural value of beauty, but these theories might have languished within the precincts of Oxford—although, indeed, Pater was not highly appreciated even there—had not Wilde examined them, meditated upon them with greater profundity than is usually supposed, and developed them to an extent of which probably their original creator had never dreamt.

This essay of Pater's on Winckelmann, how-

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ever, is so autobiographical as to deserve further notice. Here is another remark about Winckelmann which Pater, *mutatis mutandis*, meant I think to be applied to himself: "Winckelmann's life was simple, primeval, Greek. His delicate constitution permitted him the use only of bread and wine. Condemned by many as a renegade, he had no desire for places of honour, but only to see his merits acknowledged and existence assured to him. He was simple without being niggardly; he desired to be neither poor nor rich."

Now these are exactly the sentiments which we might expect a man in Pater's position to hold. They were expressed before his time, in spirit if not in letter, by the poet Gray, and since his time by Mr. A. C. Benson. But the great distinction remains: Winckelmann combines scholarship with a thorough knowledge of the world; and even Mr. Benson, despite his scholarship and his praise of the life of a Don, has dealt to a much greater degree with practical affairs—*e.g.*, education—than Pater ever attempted to do. When estimating the value of Pater's work and influence, these are factors which ought not to be lost sight of. When, for example we find Pater quoting with ap-

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proval Goethe's judgment of Winckelmann's works—"they are a life, a living thing, designed for those who are alive"—we must recollect that this is about the last thing that could be said of Pater's own writings.

It is possible that this statement may be thought strange when we consider to what extent Pater declaimed against abstract theories of beauty. For example, in his preface to *Studies in the Renaissance* he says :

Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative ; and a definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness. To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find not its universal formula but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of æsthetics. . . . What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in book to *me* ? What effect does it really produce on me ? . . . The answers to these questions are the original facts with which the æsthetic critic has to do ; and, as in the study of light, of morals, of number, one must realise such primary data for oneself or not at all, and he who experiences these impressions strongly and drives directly at the discrimination and analysis of them, has no need to trouble himself with the abstract question what beauty is in itself, or what its exact relation to truth or experience—metaphysical questions, as unprofitable as metaphysical questions elsewhere.

This apparent contempt for metaphysics

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would appear to be emphasised in the essay on Winckelmann, where Pater says : " It is easy to indulge the commonplace metaphysical instinct. But it is possible that metaphysics may be one of those things which we must renounce, if we mean to mould our lives to artistic perfection."

The fact nevertheless remains that Pater himself began by being a metaphysician. He appears to have absorbed the doctrines of the neo-Platonists quite unconsciously, and it is significant that his first public writing was a rather fragmentary essay on Coleridge considered as a philosopher. This essay appeared in the *Westminster Review* in 1866, although it had been written some time previously. Pater's mind was greatly influenced also by the liberal philosopher, Thomas Hill Green, who was himself very much under the influence of Hegel.

It was, in fact, Green who made Pater familiar with Hegel's theories and works ; and, when Pater paid his visits to Germany, he studied Hegel more and more, often quoting him with approval in his essays. This fact is not only interesting as showing the influence exercised upon Pater by the Hegelian system of philo-

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sophy, but also as indicating the primitive trend of Pater's mind. For he was undoubtedly attracted by Hegel, whereas if his instincts had been really sound he would have been repelled by him. Metaphysics had always a peculiar fascination for Pater, and he had reached his late twenties before his attention was more definitely centred upon beauty and withdrawn from metaphysical speculation.

It was about this period of his life that Pater fell in with Jahn's *Life of Winckelmann*, and an intellectual change began with a perusal of this book. It made Pater feel dissatisfied with Goethe as too passionate and with Ruskin as too idealistic; he thought, as Mr. Benson says, that he had found in Winckelmann some one "who could devote himself to the passionate contemplation of beauty, without any taint or grossness of sense, who was penetrated by fiery emotion, but without any dalliance with feminine sentiment, whose sensitiveness was preternaturally acute, while his conception was cool and firm." In thinking thus, however, Pater misjudged both Goethe and Winckelmann. It was now his desire to find some common ground where art and metaphysics might meet. The speculative instinct in the modern mind,

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to use his own expression, wanted to be satisfied, but it could not be satisfied by some vague scholastic abstraction. Pater thought he had discovered this common ground in his mistaken conception of Winckelmann's contemplation of beauty.

It never occurred to Pater that "grossness of sense" might be a necessary element in the contemplation of beauty—that the expression, in fact, amounted to a contradiction in terms. The desire to stifle the physical instincts and to contemplate beauty as a purely intellectual emotion arises naturally from the Christian school of thought—a school with which Pater at this time of his life believed that he had nothing to do, but the influence of which clung to him through his admiration of Hegel and his deep study of Plato. It is indeed of some interest to note that Pater at one time thought of becoming a Unitarian minister, and that later in life he was exceedingly regular in his attendance at church. When he acted as dean of his college, Mr. Benson tells us, Pater "never failed to occupy his stall both on Sunday morning and evening; and he was a strong advocate for Sunday services being compulsory. He said with truth that there were many men who would



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be glad to have the habit of attending, but who had failed to attend, especially on Sunday morning, partly from the attraction of breakfast parties or possibly from pure indolence, unless there was a rule of attendance. As a matter of fact, attendance was merely a matter of individual taste, but Pater continued to deplore it."

Another anecdote which throws a great deal of light on Pater's character is that relating to the advice he gave a man who wished to read for "Greats": "I cannot advise you to read any special books. The great thing is to read authors *whole*: read Plato whole; read Kant whole; read Mill whole." This is not the only indication that Pater looked with much favour upon both Kant and Mill: but they, together with Plato and Hegel, are philosophers who could not possibly be enjoyed by any one who is instinctively attracted by Greek antiquity. The appearance of Socrates marks the beginning of the artistic decline of Greece. The fact that Plato thought it worth while to commit his Socratic dialogues to writing shows to what an extent the degeneracy was beginning to spread. Few men have known Plato better than Coleridge did, and Coleridge has summed

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up Plato's philosophy in a single sentence. His philosophy and religion, he says, were but exotic at home and a mere opposition to the finite in all things, genuine prophet and anticipator as he was of the Protestant Christian era. This is a passage in Coleridge's essay on Greek drama, and it is one to which unfortunately neither students of Plato nor students of Pater have given the attention it deserved. For few things could be more opposed to the culture of the Greeks than the culture of this Protestant Christian era to which Coleridge refers; and no man who wrote in Greek could have been less Greek in soul and mind than Plato.

We see, then, how Pater began to be muddled by endeavouring in the first place to reconcile two opposed things, viz., art and metaphysics. He never cleared his brain sufficiently to be able to make up his mind between one and the other. And unfortunately he could not and did not stop here. Comparatively early in his career he had written an essay on romanticism, which at the mature age of fifty he re-issued in *Appreciations*. He undertakes what he admits to be the difficult task of discovering the formula which shall distinguish the use of the words *classical* and *romantic*. His definition

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of the first does not lead us much further, although he recognises that the romantic spirit seeks new motives, new subjects of interest and new modifications of style—something bizarre and exaggerated.

If Pater had stopped here his essay might have been interesting as one of the many attempts to distinguish between two phases of literature which are difficult to define ; but unfortunately he was not content to do this. "In truth," he says, "the legitimate contention is, not of one age or school of literary art against another, but of all successive schools alike, against the stupidity which is dead to the substance and the vulgarity which is dead to form." He then proceeds to say that our literary work should combine the qualities of romanticism and classicism : that in short it should be new in substance and old in form. The fallacy underlying this suggestion is obvious. If we acted upon the recommendation thus set forth, we should be at liberty to perpetrate the incongruity of choosing a romantic subject and endeavouring to cast it in a classical form—a mistake which has been made more than once by Swinburne, Browning, and Tennyson. By endeavouring first of all to reconcile art with

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metaphysics ; secondly, like Pico della Mirandola, to reconcile Greek philosophy with Christianity ; and thirdly, to reconcile classicism with romanticism, Pater shows that he never had a really clear conception of what his canons of æsthetic criticism should be. He saw that the French romanticism of the nineteenth century originated in Rousseau, but the range of his intellectual vision was too circumscribed to enable him to perceive that Rousseau, Kant, Plato, Hegel, and Christianity all set out from similar philosophical bases and that they themselves and the schools of thought which they typified were antithetical to that very philosophy of ancient Greece which Pater thought he understood so well.

Nor does Pater seem to have sufficiently distinguished between the romanticism of France and the romanticism of Germany. German romanticism, as I have already pointed out, originated with a few ill-cultured writers who buried themselves in romances of the Middle Ages ; but the French romanticists had come through too long a period of Latin and Greek studies to be influenced by such callow or rather degenerate models. The fact was that in France classicism had nearly developed into

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pedantry—not because of any inherent fault in classicism, but simply because its representatives were unworthy of it. French writers who, like Stendhal, called themselves romanticists, did so because the term in the early part of the nineteenth century had become a convenient one for describing writers who aimed at doing something new: they did not call themselves romanticists in the original meaning of the word as applied in Germany, because they never looked for their models among those mediæval romances which were so much in favour in contemporary Germany.

In order to understand all this, indeed, Pater would have had to study the subject as a whole, and his nature shrank from such an effort. He saw a certain part of the classico-romantic controversy, and upon this particular part he concentrated his attention. Having studied it and written about it he went back to his Greeks and Romans.

The results of Pater's further classical studies are seen in his novel *Marius the Epicurean*. If we take the essay on Leonardo as the most typical example of Pater's criticism, assuredly *Marius the Epicurean* is the best example of his purely constructive work. The novel is not

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a very long one, and the attempt is ambitious ; but the reader is bound to come to the conclusion that Pater as an essayist and critic was much superior to Pater in any other form.

Any one might safely have wagered that if Pater had wished to write about any period of antiquity he would have chosen the period which we find in this novel. The scene is laid in the second century of the Christian era, *i.e.* a time when the truly classical culture of Greece and Rome had practically disappeared, its place being taken by the inconclusive critics and dialectical neo-Platonists at Alexandria. In Rome itself all faith in religious principles had died out among the upper classes, to which Pater's hero, Marius, belonged. The higher classes in Roman society satisfied their spiritual cravings by means of numerous philosophies which they took in a more or less altered form from Greece, Egypt, and even far-off India. In Rome, therefore, as in Alexandria, there was a considerable amount of inconclusive philosophical discussion. But in an age when faith of any kind is lacking we very seldom indeed find a great poet or a great constructive philosopher, and such an age would naturally attract men who are by nature more inclined to dia-

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lectics and analysis than to the exposition of any synthetic philosophical system.

Pater, it must be said at once, was not a man of a truly creative mind; and in consequence this decadent period of the Roman Empire appealed to him immensely. He weaves his story round Marius, who is not only a Roman of the highest class but the friend of Marcus Aurelius himself. Marius cannot escape the prevailing fashion of indulging in philosophical speculation. He takes up and discards various systems, and finally, after having become a theist, he is attracted by Christianity. It should be observed, however, that it is not the dogmatic or philosophical side of Christianity that appeals to him, but its æsthetic side. Pater himself, it may be remembered, was likewise attracted more by the æsthetic side of Christianity than by its dogma or its philosophy. Nor is this the only instance where the novel may be said to be autobiographical. Although Marius has several friends—and in particular one very intimate friend Flavian—who took full advantage of that freedom in sexual indulgence which was more than tolerated at the time, Marius himself, owing to his cold and fastidious temperament, holds aloof from

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women. Exactly the same remark applies to Pater himself.

It is difficult even now in England to discuss sexual problems, from a purely scientific standpoint, with the freedom and appreciation to be found in more cultured countries. Sexuality as contemplated by the scientist is very different from the sexuality "of the sty" contemplated by the modern English novelist. From a psychological point of view the scientific analysis of a man's sexuality will throw more light upon his character than anything else. We have only to think of Goethe to realise its importance. It would be possible to say a great deal more about Pater from a critical standpoint if we had more particulars about his sexual feelings, but such particulars are unfortunately lacking in all the biographies of the man hitherto published. We can reconstruct this side of his nature from his works, but not to a very great extent. I have, however, ascertained from two or three persons who knew Pater fairly intimately that he was in the habit of collecting volumes in that particular class of French novels which, were they published in England, would at once be seized by a scandalised police. Why this remarkable fact has hitherto been concealed



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is difficult for the Continental critic to understand, for it certainly throws a very helpful light upon Pater's character. He was never suspected of any unnatural vices, but I think we are justified in taking the title of a play by Terence and calling Pater a *heauton timoroumenos*. From a medical point of view this theory is fully upheld by Pater's sudden death at a comparatively early age—when he died in July 1894, he was not quite fifty-five years old. It is true that he had not been in very good health for some time previously, but he was at all events able to go about and pursue his studies as usual, and his death occurred suddenly one morning as he was coming downstairs.

To return to Marius, however, we find him passing through practically the same intellectual stages and struggles as the French decadents of the nineteenth century, such as Huysmans. Marius is a philosopher, but his mind has been influenced by so many philosophies that his intellectual foundations have become undermined. As in the case of a man like Huysmans, there is sufficient of the artist in him to make him wish for something æsthetic, something which he cannot find in the barren dialectics of the neo-Platonists. Like many a

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later decadent, therefore, he is attracted by the æsthetic side of the Roman Catholic faith and becomes a Christian.

As an autobiographical study, throwing considerable light upon the character of the author, *Marius the Epicurean* is of interest to any one who wishes to study Pater thoroughly ; but, considered merely from the point of view of a literary effort, the book is disappointing. It is not a good psychological novel ; for in psychology as in other matters Pater's attention was concentrated upon some one point to the exclusion of everything else. He reveals to us, although half-unconsciously, many of the characteristics of the decadents of the period ; but he cannot convey to us any conception of the real nature of the people who were not decadents. A character like Cornelius, for example, corresponds to no reality whatever. On the other hand, Pater is usually accurate in what we might call the local colour ; but he certainly meant to write more than a mere archæological novel. Even his technique is open to serious criticism. Our attention is suddenly taken off the story while we have to peruse long accounts of episodes directly translated or adapted from Latin or Greek authors,

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such, for example, as the story of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius, or various discourses "lifted" from Marcus Aurelius. The book, too, seems to come to a rather unexpected ending. Marius is martyred before his thoughts have had time to mature, before he has been able to recognise that the essential elements of Christianity do not lie in its æsthetics. There are, however, little patches of the better Pater here and there. Take the description of the old Roman villa where Marius is brought up :

The little glazed windows in the uppermost chamber framed each its dainty landscape—the pallid crags of Carrara, like wildly-twisted snow-drifts above the purple heath; the distant harbour, with its freight of white marble going to sea; the lighthouse temple of *Venus Speciosa* on its dark headland amid the long-drawn curves of white breakers. . . . The air there had always a motion in it, and drove the scent of the new-mown hay along all the passages of the house.

We recognise Pater again when we read about Marius's literary training and his discernment of the fact that independence is necessary in taste :

It was a principle, the forcible apprehension of which made him jealous and fastidious in the selection of his intellectual food; often listless while others read or gazed diligently; never pretending to be

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moved out of mere complaisance to other people's emotions : it served to foster in him a very scrupulous literary sincerity with himself. And it was this uncompromising demand for a matter, in all art, derived immediately from lively personal intuition, this constant appeal to individual judgment, which saved his euphuism, even at its weakest, from lapsing into mere artifice.

This is intended to be a description of one phase of the development of the mind of Marius ; in reality it is Pater writing about the ideal Pater. For Pater's own writing is nothing in the end but another form of euphuism. He can express subtle shades of thought with great delicacy, and his phrasing is often dignified and brilliant, as for example in his criticism of "La Gioconda" ; but his style, taken as a whole, is much too complex and elaborate. When we read him we are walking with leaden shoes. We can almost feel him pausing in the middle of a sentence and looking for a word, and sometimes the result hardly justifies the strenuous efforts which have been made in the endeavour to bring the expression to perfection. This tediousness perhaps is most apparent in the *Imaginary Portraits*. A fantastic sketch is built round some biographical hint, but Pater's lack of dramatic power makes the

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characters he evolves appear utterly dreary. Now and again, of course, particularly in the description of Watteau, we come across a sentence or two showing him at his best.

The rather technical lectures published under the title of *Plato and Platonism*, and the various collected essays in the volume of *Greek Studies*, call for no particular attention here. Pater re-writes two or three scenes from Greek mythology with his customary charm, but also at times with his customary laboriousness; and modern Continental critics are certainly not with him in ranking Greek sculpture as high as he does. There were a few respects in which Pater had outgrown Hegel, but there are very many in which modern criticism and research have outgrown Pater. Although Pater was in general rather too favourably disposed towards his great predecessor, his lecture on the Genius of Plato is certainly a very stimulating production.

Despite his obvious defects, however, Pater exercised considerable influence over his contemporaries. We may almost say of him that he discovered beauty, although he did not know what to do with it. To that extent, at all events, he raised himself above the materialism of his

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time, and this may stand to his credit. If he had only been more articulate, he might almost have anticipated Wilde. But his style, despite all the care he took with it, is often exasperating. It is obvious that he was considerably influenced by Ruskin; but, whereas Ruskin wrote all too fluently, Pater stuttered.

## CHAPTER III

OSCAR WILDE

A WHOLE generation of theatre-goers have laughed over many of Gilbert's plays, but one of them, not very often performed now, was exceedingly popular in its day, viz., "Patience." It was intended to satirise, and with many and obvious exaggerations did satirise, a movement which at the time was very widespread in certain literary and pseudo-literary circles. The complaints of the dragoons, the heartfelt sighing of the "rapturous maidens," the puzzled thoughts of Patience herself, the hypocrisy of Bunthorne and the powerful attractions of Archibald Grosvenor, may seem very remote from us when we read over the play at an interval of thirty years after its first production. And yet all the satire in the play, including at least one of Gilbert's best songs, was directed at a movement which had been initiated by a clever young man in his early twenties, and which continued until the close of the century.

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Oscar Fingal O'Flaherty Wills Wilde was born in Dublin in October 1854, and went up to Oxford in time to hear both Ruskin and Pater lecture. While at Oxford he discarded his string of middle names, and preferred to be known simply by the first. Neither Pater nor Ruskin, however, exercised what might strictly be called any real influence on Wilde's thoughts or character. Ruskin's words and Pater's writings directed his attention to certain æsthetic schools of painting; and Pater no doubt led the young undergraduate to examine more than he might otherwise have done into the nature of beauty. Thenceforth Wilde took up the æsthetic movement on his own account and it was ever afterwards stamped by his personality. He had a fine set of rooms at Magdalen College, rooms which little by little became ornamented with valuable old engravings and artistic curiosities of various kinds, more particularly some blue china, judged by experts to be very old and valuable—the very set which drew from him on one occasion the famous remark, “Would that I could live up to my blue china!” He had not while at Oxford begun to adopt those eccentric styles of dress which afterwards added to his notoriety; but, what is more to the point,



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he appears to have developed those classical studies which he began early in life and continued at Trinity College, Dublin.

It was doubtless the numerous dinner and supper parties given in his rooms that led Oscar Wilde to develop his conversational fluency and gift of repartee. He had already begun to assume his charming poses, and he deceived all his friends with respect to his artistic merits by intimating quite calmly that if he were cast on his own resources for a living he would take to painting pictures. But his affectation—"the dangerous and delightful distinction of being different from others," as he put it—by no means endeared him to his fellow-undergraduates. His rooms were raided more than once, and he himself was personally subjected to some very unæsthetic treatment.

In 1877 Wilde was fortunate enough to be able to visit Greece with a party which included John Pentland Mahaffy. One effect of this journey was to add considerably to his already profound knowledge of the spirit of Greek antiquity, and a second was to make him more favourably disposed than he had been to the Roman Catholic Church. Although in the next year Wilde won the Newdigate Prize by his

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poem on Ravenna, and contributed several articles to various periodicals; his literary career really began with the publication of his volume of poems in 1881. His name had already become known in connection with the æsthetic movement, and, in addition to Gilbert's play already referred to, he was the subject of a few cartoons in *Punch*, which may be described as good-naturedly spiteful. His poems, however, were not approved of by the majority of the critics, and at least one of them complained that, although Mr. Wilde's name had for some time been associated with a certain definite movement, his poems did not seem to convey any particular message concerning it. This complaint was to some extent justified, nor did Wilde in his public writings do anything towards removing it for ten years. In the eighties he secured a certain amount of fame by the publication of various stories and essays; but his first real contribution towards elucidating for the philistine mind the mysteries of the æsthetic cult was his *Intentions*, published in 1891. It is true that some of the essays included in the volume had already been published in magazines a year or two before, but when they were collected into a bound book they met

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with much more attention and abuse. In *The Decay of Lying* and in *The Critic as Artist* the æsthetic philosophy and the æsthetic literary canons may be said to have been laid down once and for all.

To understand why it should have been necessary to lay down any such canons of taste and criticism, we must glance at the state of English literature when Wilde came upon the scene and for a few years previously. The event which Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton describes as "the renaissance of wonder in poetry" was long past; but Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and Byron had left no successors to carry on the movement thus initiated. English literature in general showed a distinct tendency to fall below the classical level and to follow the old forms of classicism without following its spirit. Swinburne, as Mr. Waugh long ago pointed out, has left us nothing but melody, and men like Leslie Stephen, Tennyson, Browning, Lewis Morris, Henley, Thomas Hardy, Birrell, and William Watson—I merely cite a few representative names—did not seek to rejuvenate classicism in a classic form and hardly prevented it, indeed, from degenerating into dull pedantry. The spirit of the age, too, was dominated by a

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Liberal mode of thinking, with its inevitable accompaniments of materialism and philistinism.

It is a well-known psychological fact that a materialistic age unconsciously seeks some idealistic philosophy. Tradesmen, money-changers, and speculators soothe such conscience as they have by romantic poetry and impressionism in painting. If, therefore, one side of British materialism in the nineteenth century is represented in the works of men like Browning, Meredith, or Morley, we find the other extreme represented by those writers of a romantic tendency who were naturally called into being by the spirit of a materialistic age. The most eminent among these writers were men like Oscar Wilde himself, Arthur Symonds, Max Beerbohm, Ernest Dowson, Hubert Crackanthorpe, George Bernard Shaw, John Davidson, and Gissing, together with many who cannot be ranked quite so high, such as Richard le Gallienne, St. John Hankin, Fiona McLeod, George Moore, and Francis Thompson.

From about the middle of the nineteenth century, then, the progress of English literature may be approximately represented by three

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lines starting from a common base. The middle line may be taken to represent a truly classical literature: but from this line two others branch off, one to the right and one to the left, and the more they are extended in their different directions the more do they become separated from the line representing classicism and from one another. On the one line we find the writers who initiated no new classical literature movement, and who merely followed the letter of the traditions which had come down to them without endeavouring to follow their spirit; and along the other line we find those idealistic poets and prose-writers who are generally associated with the æsthetic movement. The middle line of classicism is represented up to the eighties by only one man whose mind was steeped in classical culture and who had a thorough insight into the relationship in which antiquity stood to modern times. This man was Matthew Arnold; and his critical essays will compare favourably with anything in Continental literature. It is surely obvious that when Arnold criticised Continental writers like Joubert or Heine, and when he wrote on the literary influence of academies, he had in mind at the same time the romantic period in

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English literature which he foresaw but did not live to see. It may, I think, be assumed that if Arnold had lived for a few years longer he would have preferred decadent classicists of the Henley school to romanticists of the Wilde school; and I say this because the Henley school, at all events, displayed one classical trait, which was almost entirely lacking in the romantic school of the time, viz., that peculiar literary and philosophic stability which it is difficult to define. It is the writers of the romantic school who are dealt with in this volume, not because their works are likely to last for all time, or because they are to be taken as models for present-day writers; but because these romanticists did at all events endeavour to initiate a new literary movement by combining the best features of classicism and romanticism. They had Pater's authority for thinking that this was possible, but unfortunately this authority misled them.

Oscar Wilde not only brought the new movement prominently to the notice of the public, but he also took a very great natural delight in shocking the middle-class intellects of his time by his own exaggerated posing and affectations. When Gilbert in the play already men-

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The artist is the creator of beautiful things.

The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault.

Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope.

They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.

No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors.

We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely.

All art is quite useless.

It is hardly possible for us at the present day to realise the effect of utterances like these in the early nineties. Here was something new, bold, original. There was only one fallacy underlying the whole movement : but that one fallacy forms the entire distinction between romanticism and classicism. The motto of the romantic school, as may be guessed from the principles just quoted, was the well-known

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catchword, Art for Art's sake. The principle of the classic school from Nietzsche back to Aristotle and from Aristotle back to the philosophers of India has always been Art for the sake of Life.

It would be interesting to speculate as to how far the theosophical movement of the seventies and eighties influenced the outlook of the Pater-Wilde school. As the result of what would in philosophical parlance be called the degradation of aristocratic values, one of the inferior religious systems of the East was investigated with great avidity and widely propagated in England and America by bands of enthusiasts. There is an important philosophical distinction between Buddhism (which forms the basis of theosophy) and Christianity ; but this is a matter which I have dealt with at length elsewhere. It will be sufficient for our purpose to say here that both religions take up a negative attitude towards life, mankind, and the world in which we live. The attention of the Christian is centred upon his after-life in another world ; and the aim of the Buddhist is to reach Nirvana and become utterly extinct.

It could easily be shown that these aims are utterly opposed to the aims of the Greek



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philosophers ; and they are, of course, inferior to the tenets of the oldest and highest of Indian religions, Brahminism. So far as we can now know, there was only one philosopher of classic antiquity whose thoughts had what might be called a Buddhistic tendency, and this philosopher was Plato. It is of no little significance for us to know that Plato exercised such a large influence, both directly and indirectly, on the romanticists of the eighties. It is strange to note, and the reflection is tinged with irony, how the course of a nation's literature for a generation or more may be influenced by some purely chance event. In the early seventies Professor Jowett had published his excellent English translation of Plato's complete works, and his lucid and well-written introductions and notes turned the attention of hundreds of students to Plato rather than to the more aristocratic Greek philosophers, such as Heraclitus and Aristotle. It is only within quite recent years that we have had a good version of Heraclitus in English, and a complete version of Aristotle still remains to be published.

It is true that Wilde himself possessed a good knowledge of Greek and appears to have read much of Aristotle in the original ; but the

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fact nevertheless remains that Jowett's Plato, his essays on Plato, and the glamour he threw over Plato, gave to the entire thought of the time a Platonic trend, a trend which was indirectly accentuated by the theosophical movement which I have already referred to. The effect of all this was that life, so to speak, fell into disrepute and its place was taken by purely abstract conceptions of beauty and art.

Another factor of the utmost importance was also entirely overlooked by these romantic writers of the eighties and nineties. It never occurred to them that one man might be driven to create owing to his superabundance of creative power and that another man might be driven to create merely as the result of his intellectual poverty. Only the first mentioned can be truly called an artist at all, and he is a classicist. He transforms and re-interprets the chaos of nature for the benefit of man; or as Mr. A. M. Ludovici expresses it in his *Nietzsche and Art*: "Just as the musician cries Time! Time! Time! to the cacophonous medley of natural sounds that pour into his ears from all sides and assembles them rhythmically for our ears hostile to disorder, so the graphic artist cries Time! Time! Time! to the incessant

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and kaleidoscopic procession of things from birth to death, and places in the layman's arms the eternalised image of that portion of life for which he happens to feel great gratitude."

The romantic artist, however, is unable to bring order out of chaos in this way. He either paints or writes something entirely unnatural, something corresponding to no reality whatever, like the Nirvana of the Buddhists; or he contents himself by merely placing nature and reality on canvas or on paper, without attempting to give them any kind of re-interpretation.

In his essay on *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde shows us that he had at all events a glimpse of this truth. He saw that truth itself—*i.e.* mere naked reality—could not properly be called art at all. He realised that it was grotesque to suggest, as is so often suggested by the simple-minded British philistine even now, that art should be called in to serve morality; but unhappily he failed to see that art should be called in to serve life. Wilde's Hellenism easily prevented him from falling into the first error, and his influence prevented many younger writers of the time from doing so; but unfortunately Plato's influence led him into a second error which counterbalanced the former, *viz.*,

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the error of thinking that art could stand alone. Mr. Ludovici has concisely summed up the classical standard by saying that the purpose of man is a thousand times more important than the purpose of art, and the one determines the other. In order that we may properly understand Wilde's point of view, let us take the following paragraph from *The Decay of Lying* :

Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle. Art takes life as part of her rough material, re-creates it, and re-fashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, brings and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment. The third stage is when Life gets the upper hand and drives Art out in the wilderness. That is the true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering.

This argument of Wilde's is fallacious ; and in using it he failed to rise above his age. What Wilde really objected to, if he had only known it, was not life itself, but the inferior form of existence brought about as the result of the Liberal and democratic propaganda which had lasted well over a century. The writings of Liberal philosophers from Bentham to Mill had gradually

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influenced the entire artistic and philosophical outlook of England, and influenced it for the worse. The main principle of this teaching was that all men were equal, one of the most monstrous fallacies that have ever been taken for granted by a credulous world. Of course, if all men were equal, it followed that there could be only one view of art, truth, or beauty, and similar abstract principles. It therefore became necessary to discover some form of artistic truth which could be made common to all, and naturally the only truth which could be made common to all was reality. The inevitable result was Constable's haystacks; Frith's "Derby Day"; Holman Hunt's "Light of the World"; Martin Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*; Browning's *Sordello*, and similar artistic and literary atrocities. This too was the period when portraits were actually painted to represent the sitter instead of being painted so as to enable the artist to re-interpret life through the sitter, who is, from the artistic point of view, of comparatively little importance.

It was natural for Wilde to object to all this democratised art, and, had it not been for the influence of Plato and his English disciples of the period, Wilde might have anticipated many of

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the theories which were afterwards laid down with such admirable clearness by Whistler. The Platonic influence was too strong for him, however, and in consequence the essays gathered together under the heading of *Intentions* contain a series of half-truths. As an example of this, take another passage from *The Decay of Lying* :

Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis. But Life soon shattered the perfection of the form. Even in Shakespeare we can see the beginning of the end. It shows itself by the gradual breaking-up of the blank verse in the later plays, by the predominance given to prose, and by the over-importance assigned to characterisation. The passages in Shakespeare—and they are many—where the language is uncouth, vulgar, exaggerated, fantastic, obscene even, are entirely due to Life calling for an echo of her own voice, and rejecting the intervention of beautiful style through which alone should life be suffered to find expression. Shakespeare is not by any means a flawless artist. He is too fond of going directly to life and borrowing life's natural utterance. He forgets that when Art surrenders her imaginative medium she surrenders everything.

The accusation here is just, but the explanation inaccurate. It would be more correct to say that Shakespeare goes to nature too much, and “to hold the mirror up to nature” is, as Wilde

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said, the worst advice that could be given to an actor or a dramatist. It is not fair, however, to lay the blame of this upon life itself. What should be blamed is, as Heine clearly saw, that romanticism of the Middle Ages the effects of which were not entirely obliterated even by the Renaissance.

Wilde touches upon this matter once again in his essay dealing with the critic as artist, where he says: "What are the two supreme and highest arts? Life and literature, life and the perfect expression of life." When we read a little further and find him referring to "the fatal development of the habit of reading amongst the middle and lower classes of this country," we wonder for a moment whether he has actually recognised the fact that there is such a thing as artistic hierarchy, especially when he goes on to refer to Greek prose composition. But this merely leads up to a disquisition on a subject which, however important, is hardly one we might have expected to meet with. We do not find artistic hierarchy discussed, but there are some very interesting passages on the critical faculty and its use. Some twenty-five years previously Matthew Arnold had written at length

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on "the function of criticism at the present time," and Wilde's work shows that he was not uninfluenced by what our one really great critic of the nineteenth century had said. One of the most significant passages in Arnold's essay is this :

The critical power is of lower rank than the creative. True ; but in assenting to this proposition, one or two things are to be kept in mind. It is undeniable that the exercise of a creative power, that a free creative activity is the true function of man ; it is proved to be so by man's finding in it his true happiness. But it is undeniable also that men may have the sense of exercising this free creative activity in other ways than in producing great works of literature or art ; if it were not so, all but a very few men would be shut out from the true happiness of all men ; they may have it in well-doing ; they may have it in learning, they may have it even in criticising. . . . The creative power has for its happy exercise appointed elements, and those elements are not in its own control. Nay, they are more within the control of the critical power. It is the business of the critical power in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, to see the object as in itself it really is. Thus it tends at last to make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself. It tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces ; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society. The touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere ; out of this stir and growth come the creative epochs of literature.



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Or to narrow our range and quit these considerations of the general march of genius and of society, considerations which are apt to become too abstract and impalpable—every one can see that a poet, for instance, ought to know life and the world before dealing with poetry, and life and the world being, in modern times, very complex things, the creation of a modern poet, to be worth much, implies a great critical effort behind it ; else it must be a comparatively poor, barren, and short-lived affair.

With his customary insight, Matthew Arnold has here penetrated to the very root of the matter, but his theories, after Wilde has meditated upon them, are found to be susceptible of a little exaggeration. If we turn once more to Wilde's essay on the critic as artist, we find him saying :

Without the critical faculty there is no artistic creation at all worthy of the name. An age that has no criticism is either an age in which art is immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types, or an age that possesses no art at all. . . . There has never been a creative age that has not been critical also. For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms. The tendency of creation is to repeat itself.

A page or two further on we find this thought repeated, for Wilde says : " Each new school as it appears cries out against criticism, but it is to the critical faculty in man that it owes its

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origin. The mere creative instinct does not innovate but reproduces."

Up to this point Wilde is on the whole seen to be in sympathy with Arnold; but the æsthetic philosophy, it would appear, must needs go further. Wilde cannot pause when he says: "Most modern criticism is perfectly valueless. So is most modern creative work also. Mediocrity weighing mediocrity in the balance and incompetence applauding its brother—that is the spectacle which the artistic activity of England affords us from time to time." After this comes the unexpected dogma: "Criticism demands infinitely more cultivation than creation itself. Anybody can write a three-volumed novel. It merely requires a complete ignorance of both life and literature. . . . It is very much more difficult to talk about a thing than to do it. In the sphere of actual life that is, of course, obvious. Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write about it. . . . Action, indeed, is always easy, and when presented to us in its most aggravated, because most continuous form, which I take to be that of real industry, becomes simply the refuge of people who have nothing whatsoever to do."

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After this the essay degenerates for a time into Buddhism, and we learn that in the sphere of action a conscious aim is a delusion and that "there has been no material improvement that has not spiritualised the world." In the last case, of course, Wilde is endeavouring to explain away the English materialism of the time. He saw that materialism brought with it a certain complementary artistic movement; but he did not recognise that this movement was idealistic rather than classic.

Once more Wilde approaches the truth in the course of this essay when he refers to Pater's view of criticism and quotes his remarks on "La Gioconda," adding: "The criticism which I have quoted is criticism of the highest kind. It treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation. It does not confine itself—let us at least suppose so for the moment—to discovering the real intention of the artist and accepting that as final. And in this it is right, for the meaning of any beautiful created thing is, at least, as much in the soul of him who looks at it as it was in his soul who wrought it. Nay, it is rather the beholder who lends to the beautiful thing its myriad meanings and makes it marvellous for us."

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Here once again Wilde appears to forget the importance of artistic hierarchy. We may easily pardon Walter Pater for looking at Leonardo's famous picture and reading into it a meaning which Leonardo himself did not intend to be read there. But what was likely to happen had any one of those middle-class philistines, against whom Wilde himself railed so heartily, looked at "La Gioconda"? It is, indeed, only too easy to answer this question: we can see for ourselves what has happened in the mediocre art, mediocre literature, and deplorable literary and artistic criticism of the present day. The inferior mind of the middle-class has become dominant in politics, theology, literature, and art. In consequence of this a high type of creative work no longer exists among us; and, worse still, the types of really good creative work which have been handed down to us are not appreciated.

It is well worth while continuing our analysis of this particular essay, because in it the entire philosophy of the romantic school may be said to be summed up. As in the case of most of the critical essays by Wilde and Pater—not to mention Mr. Arthur Symons and other members of the school—we find classicism alternating

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with romanticism. Wilde seemed to know, for example, that tradition played a necessary part in art, for he says: "To realise the nineteenth century, we must realise every century that has preceded it and that has contributed to its making." But this statement is followed at no great distance by another: "The ΒΙΟΣ ΘΕΩΡΗΤΙΚΟΣ is the true ideal. From the high tower of thought we can look out upon the world. Calm and self-centred and complete, the æsthetic critic contemplates life, and no arrow drawn at a venture can pierce between the joints of his harness. He at least is safe. He has discovered how to live." This, it need hardly be said, is Buddhism rather than Hellenism, and Wilde falls away from the classical ideal when he says a few lines further on: "Action of every kind belongs to the sphere of ethics; the aim of art is simply to create a mood." This is very far from the re-interpretation of nature for the benefit of man; but it is an echo of some of Pater's ideas. For Pater, it will be remembered, did not see men or nature whole, but contented himself with interpreting and describing a few characteristics, a few moods. It is possible that the joint influence of Pater and Wilde induced Mr. Symons

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to write a few years later in the preface to the second edition of *London Nights* :

The moods of man ! There I find my subject, there the region over which art rules ; and whatever has once been a mood of mine, though it has been no more than a ripple of the sea and had no longer than that ripple's duration, I claim the right to render, if I can, in verse.

Compare this with another remark made by Wilde in the essay from which I have already quoted : " Each mode of criticism is at its highest development simply a mood, and we are never more true to ourselves than when we are inconsistent. The æsthetic critic, constant only to the principle of beauty in all things, will ever be looking for fresh impressions, winning from the various schools the secret of their charm, bowing, it may be, before foreign altars, or smiling, if it be his fancy, at strange new gods." All art, then, according to this, is simply a mood ; criticism itself is simply a mood ; and we are to create these moods by borrowing principles from every school that has ever existed. Whatever may be created in this fashion will be anything but a classical school of art. The plan of winning various charms from various schools is but a reminiscence of Plato's theory that a school could be created

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by combining classicism and romanticism. A medley of principles, however, inevitably leads to discord, and this clashes with one of the main principles of classicism, viz., simplicity.

As we approach the end of the essay it is clear that the romantic element in it predominates, as it predominated in the closing years of Wilde's life. We come across frequent references to Plato and elaborations of his theories, such, for example, as "Art . . . does not spring from inspiration, but it makes others inspired. Reason is not the faculty to which it appeals. If one loves Art at all, one must love it beyond all other things in the world, and against such love the reason, if one listened to it, would cry out. There is nothing sane about the worship of beauty. It is too splendid to be sane. Those of whose lives it forms the dominant note will always seem to the world to be pure visionaries." The classicist, of course, also loves art and beauty; but there is one thing he loves better, and that is life. Art for the sake of life, the principle of classicism, would ill-accord with art beyond all else, the principle of Wilde's romanticism.

This, then, is the great distinction, and it is so well seen in this one essay that, from the

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critical point of view, Wilde's other works hardly concern us. It must nevertheless be said that he himself was a better artist than he was a theorist. His remarks on men and things, now bitter and now paradoxical, are never out of place. How well he sums up one of our best known of modern writers, when he says, referring to Mr. Kipling, "As one turns over the pages of his *Plain Talks from the Hills*, one feels as if one were seated under a palm tree reading life by superb flashes of vulgarity. From the point of view of literature, Mr. Kipling is a genius who drops his aspirates." And how right he is again when he says, through the mouth of Lord Darlington, in *Lady Windermere's Fan*: "Between men and women there is no friendship possible. There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship." Modern journalism, again, is dealt with once and for all in that politely ironical passage: "There is much to be said in favour of modern journalism. By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, it keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community. By carefully chronicling the current events of contemporary life, it shows us of what very little importance such events really are. By invariably dis-



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cussing the unnecessary, it makes us understand what things are requisite for culture and what are not." And if we want to know about the origin of the mentality of the nihilist we can find few better descriptions than this: "The nihilist, that strange martyr who has no faith, who goes to the stake without enthusiasm and dies for what he does not believe in, is purely a literary product. He was invented by Tourgenieff and completed by Dostoieffski." There is a sly hit in: "Modern pictures are no doubt beautiful to look at. At least some of them are. But they are quite impossible to live with; they are too clever; too assertive; too intellectual. Their meaning is too obvious and their method too clearly defined. One exhausts what they have to say in a very short time, and then they become as tedious as one's relations."

I do not, however, profess to give even a tithe of Wilde's epigrams; for that would mean quoting *Dorian Gray* and most of his plays almost in full; but we must not let the wittiness of his epigrams blind us to the fact that they were all prepared with infinite care and skill and that in most of them the wit is based on sound scholarship, keen observation,

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and much more than merely superficial insight into men and things. It does not matter to us that Wilde himself failed to put into practice his own theories regarding beauty; or that very often in his essays he confused the technique of art with art itself. As he says in *Dorian Gray*, the value of an idea has nothing whatever to do with the sincerity of the man who expresses it—indeed, the probabilities are that the more insincere the man is, the more purely intellectual will the idea be, as, in that case, it will not be coloured by either his wants, his desires, or his prejudices. Nor need we lay too much stress on Wilde's posing and attitudinising. He went about with sunflowers, poppies, and lilies for much the same reason as induced Disraeli to wear yellow waistcoats with blue trousers. His dress, his poses, his paradoxes, all had the effect of attracting public attention and of causing art and beauty to be discussed seriously in circles where they had hitherto been taken too much for granted. Wilde may have been right or wrong, but he was at all events a stimulant.

Unfortunately Wilde's craving for new sensations led him into forbidden paths. To what chiefly must we attribute his perverted sexual

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instincts? We have not, unfortunately, all the documents connected with his life and works which are likely to throw any new light on this subject. If I am correctly informed, Mr. Robert Ross, for example, still possesses several unpublished portions of the *De Profundis*, and these, it is almost certain, will prove of inestimable advantage to the psychologist who is genuinely interested in Wilde's character. It is difficult, again, to go fully into the matter without hurting the feelings of many people who are still living; but from Wilde's own works (particularly *Dorian Gray* and *De Profundis*) and also from his published letters, a certain amount of trustworthy information can be obtained.

It must, above all, be borne in mind that Wilde came of an unusually cultured family, and that his mother especially was a very remarkable woman. She was, indeed, of so remarkable a temperament that Wilde, in my opinion, must have been born with an extraordinarily delicate nervous system and must have been influenced from a very early age by an organic neurosis, the effects of which on his character were not mitigated or counterbalanced by his merely muscular strength.

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In this delicate and nervous condition Wilde went up to Oxford from Trinity College, Dublin, at a time of life when his character was more than usually liable to be influenced by his surroundings. Now, the moral side of Oxford has been so concisely explained by Mr. R. H. Sherard in his *Life of Oscar Wilde* that I cannot do better than quote the passage in question :

For there is no use denying it : Oxford, which is the finest school in the world for the highest culture, is also the worst training-ground for the lowest forms of debauchery. It all depends on the character of the student, his early home-training, his natural propensities, his physical state, his religious belief. Oxford produces side by side the saint, the sage, and the depraved libertine. She sends men to Parnassus or to the public-house, the Latium or the lenocinium. The Dons ignore the very horrors which are going on under their very eyes. They are wrapped up in the petty concerns of the University hierarchy ; they are of men the most unpractical and least worldly ; while possibly their deep classical studies have so familiarised them with certain pathological manifestations that they really fail to understand the horror of much that is the common jest of the undergraduates. Oxford has rendered incalculable service to the Empire, but she has also fostered and sent forth great numbers of men who have contributed to poison English society. It is very possible that if Sir William Wilde had not sent his second son to Oxford, but had left him in Ireland, where certain forms of perversion are totally unknown, and where vice generally is regarded with universal horror which contrasts most strongly with

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the mischievous tolerances which English society manifests towards it, Oscar would now be living in Dublin, one of the lights of Trinity College, one of the glories of Ireland, a scholar and a gentleman of universal reputation.

No one who is well acquainted with the life of undergraduates at the two great universities will venture to doubt Mr. Sherard's words; and I think it is unquestionable that it was while at Oxford that Wilde for the first time became familiar with the form of debauchery which finally resulted in his expulsion from society. Whatever extenuating circumstances there might have been in connection with the particular case for which Wilde was sentenced to two years' imprisonment in May 1895, the middle-class public, forgetting some of the principles of Wilde's own teaching and taking everything he had written at its face value, pointed triumphantly to *Dorian Gray* as absolutely certain proof that the author of it had all along been a perverted criminal at heart. Certainly the book is partly autobiographical, but it does not follow that Wilde in real life ever tried to do what Dorian Gray did in fiction. The book is rather an idealistic attempt to show how certain sensations might be procured and

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the sufferings which would inevitably overcome any man who tried to procure them. The references to Dorian Gray's "mysterious and prolonged absences," "his sordid room in the little ill-famed tavern near the docks," "his mad hungers that grew more ravenous as he fed them," and so on, may be taken for what they are worth. We may oppose to them the references to the æsthetic side of Dorian Gray, his liking for the Roman Catholic ritual, his dabbling in mysticism, his study of perfumes, his collection of strange musical instruments from all corners of the earth, his love of jewellery, and the extraordinary heap of fine stones he got together, not to speak of his passion for embroideries, tapestries, and ecclesiastical vestments. In the minds of that portion of the public who followed the progress of the æsthetic movement and its leader with awe and horror, such collections of æsthetic ornaments, such concrete representations of beauty and art, almost came to be associated with sexual debauchery and sexual perversion. It was no wonder, then, that Wilde's sentence was looked upon as the slow but certain justice of an outraged Supreme Power. It had the effect not only of bringing to a sudden termination the

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æsthetic movement in England, but of covering with obloquy all those who had been associated with it.

From the late nineties onward we heard very little of the literary, philosophical, political, or sociological movements which had been initiated about the eighties. Professor George Saintsbury, Mr. Austin Dobson, and Mr. Edmund Gosse have ceased to write with their former fervour and vigour. Mr. George Bernard Shaw and Mr. H. G. Wells have gradually laid less and less emphasis upon their former extreme socialistic opinions, and, instead of leading us towards the millennium, they have settled down into wealthy and thoroughly respectable members of the upper bourgeoisie. If Mr. George Moore and Mr. W. B. Yeats have not become quite so successful in a worldly sense, they do not at all events write with the same enthusiasm and passion as of yore. The romantic movement of the eighties and nineties, then, soon exhausted itself. A few of its representatives, like Dowson and Lionel Johnson, died sad deaths ; its foremost figure was put in gaol ; and others, reserved for a worse fate, became respectable members of society.

After Wilde had been released from prison,

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he produced *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and the *De Profundis*. The ballad is far from carrying into practice Wilde's theories of what poetic composition should be, and the *De Profundis* is, of course, chiefly remarkable as a biographical document.

One is naturally tempted to ask whether Wilde means everything he says in the *De Profundis* or whether—if we may adapt a phrase from Dr. Johnson—a man who has posed all his life will pose to the last. The book is the work of a broken, despairing man; but here and there the style displays a certain amount of affectation, though the book must not on this account be treated as a hypocritical document. Like all other people who are in the depths, Wilde naturally turns to Christianity and Platonism for such relief as they can afford him. Hence the emphasis which is laid upon sorrow and suffering:

Clergymen and people who use phrases without wisdom sometimes talk of suffering as a mystery. It is really a revelation. One discerns things one never discerned before. . . . I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great art. . . . Truth in art is the unity of a thing with itself; the outward rendered expressive of the inward; the soul made incarnate; the body instinct with spirit. For



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this reason there is no truth comparable to sorrow. There are times when sorrow appears to me to be the only truth. Other things may be illusions of the eye or the appetite, made to blind the one and cloy the other, but out of sorrow have the worlds been built, and at the birth of a child or a star there is pain. . . . The secret of life is suffering. . . . It is what is hidden behind everything.

Apart from the fact that Wilde is here confusing sorrow with mere physical pain, there is a factor underlying this and similar outbursts in the book which has never been sufficiently taken into account, viz., that Wilde is here speaking as what Nietzsche would call an inferior man. He has been degraded, he is suffering, he is wretched, and in order to justify his degradation and sorrow and wretchedness, he endeavours to set them upon a philosophical foundation, and to use this foundation in addition as the basis of a new theory of art and truth.

The romanticist in Wilde, however, is easily seen when, further on in the book, he writes : "I remember saying once to André Gide as we supped together in some Paris café that while metaphysics had but little real interest for me and morality absolutely none, there was nothing that either Plato or Christ had said that could not be transferred immediately into the sphere of art and there find its complete fulfilment."

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It is true that what Plato and Christ said may be adequately represented in art and has indeed been so represented by the Italian painters of the period immediately preceding the Renaissance, as well as by several English painters of modern times. But it does not seem to occur to Wilde that such art is utterly inferior: it depresses man, throws a doubt on the present world and makes life itself seem valueless. What, one may ask, would have been produced in India and Greece and Rome if art had been subjected to the unique test of sorrow ?

This failure to distinguish between the superior and inferior art was the inevitable outcome of the philosophy of the romantic school. There was no real test for art judged merely as art ; there was a very real test for art judged as an aid to life. None of those who took part in the æsthetic movement ever thought of applying this test, and they are therefore unable to recognise when they are moving on a high plane and when they are moving on a low plane. Wilde is quite right when he says in the *De Profundis* that Christ was not merely the supreme individualist, but that He was the first individualist in history, and when he indicates again that Christ was the

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precursor of the romantic movement in life, and that He took children as the type of what people should try to become. Wilde makes all these statements in justification of his unfortunate position ; but he does not see that they condemn him for ever as an idealist and romanticist and consequently as an inferior artist.

While, however, Wilde's works are not destined to be permanent in the sense that we speak of Cicero or Homer as permanent, they will nevertheless last long. Where our own language is concerned they are distinctive. No other English writer can give us at the same time such brilliant persiflage, such biting cynicism, and such expressive style. Like Dr. Johnson, indeed, he may go down to posterity by his conversation alone long after his works have been forgotten. In spite of the efforts of many whom Wilde knew intimately, however, it seems to me—more especially as Mr. Robert Ross has up to the present held his hand—that a really complete account of the man has yet to be prepared. He was the leader of a movement and he had many disciples. But, as he himself said, all great men have their disciples nowadays, and it is usually Judas who writes the biography.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE "YELLOW BOOK" SCHOOL

IN the eighties and nineties various publications aimed at producing something new in literature and art. The best known were probably the *National Observer*, which Henley edited at one time, *The Yellow Book*, and *The Savoy*. *The Pageant* and *The Dome* were unfortunately too short-lived to exercise any serious influence. The traditions of all these periodicals may be said to be merged to a great extent in the present *New Age*. Of the older publications referred to *The Yellow Book* was undoubtedly the most important, and may likewise be said to have been the most representative. Like *The Savoy* and *The Dome* it attained the height of its brilliancy with the first few numbers. Its art editor in 1894 (when it began to be published) was Aubrey Beardsley, and its literary editor Henry Harland. When Beardsley left *The Yellow Book*, however, its fortunes began to decline; for all the exertions of talented artists

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could not make up for the drawings of the one artist among them who was a genius.

*The Yellow Book* series certainly opened brilliantly. Volume I contained what was probably the best article in the set of thirteen volumes—*A Defence of Cosmetics*, by Max Beerbohm—and the other items are, to say the least, meritorious. Mr. A. C. Benson, Professor George Saintsbury, and Mr. Edmund Gosse wrote with a freshness, and, indeed, one might even say a fervour, which is lacking in their later works. Mr. Waugh's essay entitled *Reticence in Literature* will call for some further comment in the course of this chapter; and the two poems by Mr. John Davidson (*London* and *Down-a-down*) are thoroughly Davidsonian. At least a dozen other articles or poems are distinctive and superior, and Beardsley is, if not at his best, at all events far above the other artists who collaborated with him.

Mr. Max Beerbohm's brilliant *Defence of Cosmetics* does not readily lend itself to quotation; but Mr. Arthur Waugh's *Reticence in Literature* deserves to have the attention of a twentieth-century public directed to it. Many of the views expressed in it are such as we should not have generally expected to find

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uttered in the nineties, and in any case only a man like Harland would have had judgment enough at that time to publish them at all. I take the following from Mr. Waugh's essay :

We may take it as a rough working axiom that the point of reticence in literature, judged by a contemporary standard, should be settled by the point of reticence in the conversation and the taste and culture of the age. . . . The course of the highest thought of the time should be the course of its literature, the limit of the most delicate taste of the time the limit of literary expression : whatever falls below that standard is a shortcoming, whatever exceeds it is a violence. Obviously the standard varies immensely with the period. . . . Art, we say, claims every subject for her own ; she may fairly gather her subjects where she will. Most true. But there is all the difference in the world between drawing life as we find it, sternly and relentlessly, surveying it all the while from outside with the calm, unflinching gaze of criticism, and, on the other hand, yielding ourselves to the warmth and colour of its excesses, losing our judgment in the ecstasies of the joy of life, becoming, in a word, effeminate. . . . It is unmanly, it is effeminate, it is inartistic, to gloat over pleasure, to revel in immoderation, to become passion's slave ; and literature demands as much calmness of judgment, as much reticence, as life itself. The man who loses reticence loses self-respect, and the man who has no respect for himself will scarcely find others to venerate him.

Mr. Waugh goes on to refer to the realistic movement in English literature in the latter part

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of the nineteenth century, when, as he rightly says, the English man-of-letters indulged with an entirely new freedom in his "national birthright of outspokenness." This outspokenness degenerated, in Mr. Waugh's opinion, into mere licence—a licence in poetry the effects of which, it seems to me, can be seen at the present day in our sexual novels and problem plays. "The age of brutality pure and simple is dead with us, it is true," says Mr. Waugh, "but the age of effeminacy appears, if one is to judge by recent evidence, to be growing to its dawn. The day that follows will, if it fulfils the promise of its morning, be very serious and very detrimental to the future of our literature."

We cannot, unfortunately, doubt that this prophecy has come very near to realisation. The degenerate poetry of the period with which Mr. Waugh is concerned certainly influenced other branches of literature. The great mass of the people could not be reached by poetical works, but they could be reached and were ultimately reached by novels, which in their own way are even more degenerate. The modern novel does not appear to be complete without a sex problem: not as if sex were considered from a strictly scientific or psychological point

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of view, not as if the subject were treated as Goethe treated it so well in the *Elective Affinities*, but in a crude, ultra-realistic fashion. The average novel published in England at present simply contains all the nastiness of the average French novel without its delicacy of style and finesse of treatment.

Mr. Waugh's criticism of Swinburne from this standpoint of reticence is quite sound. It is true, as he states, that Swinburne brought us no new message, no philosophy, no new vision of life, no criticism of contemporary existence. "There remains the melody alone; and this, when once it is surpassed, will charm us little enough. We shall forget it then. Art brings its revenges, and this will be one of them."

Is not this statement already proving true? Seldom has Swinburne's unrestrained melody been so calmly and definitely dealt with. Let me conclude this reference to Mr. Waugh with one more quotation from his essay. He is speaking of the developments of realism and he sums them up excellently:

The two developments of realism of which we have been speaking seem to me to typify the two excesses into which frankness is inclined to fall; on the one hand, the excess prompted by effeminacy—that is to say, by the want of restraint which starts from ener-



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vated sensation ; and, on the other, the excess which results from a certain brutal virility, which proceeds from coarse familiarity with indulgence. The one whispers, the other shouts ; the one is the language of the courtesan, the other of the bargee. What we miss in both alike is that true frankness which springs from the artistic and moral temperament. . . . How is art served by all this ? . . . Our poets, who know no rhyme for "rest" except that "breast" whose snowinesses and softnesses they are for ever describing with every accent of indulgence, whose eyes are all for frills, if not for garters, what have they sung that was not sung with far greater beauty and sincerity in the days when frills and garters were alluded to with the open frankness that cried shame on him who evil thought ?

Mr. Waugh might have added that this state of things arose from the misdirected Puritanism of the Victorian era, which was unable to distinguish between immodesty and immorality. In England above all countries it is difficult to compile moral statistics ; but it may safely be said that there was no more immorality in the Elizabethan period, when speech was frank, than in the Victorian era, when speech was hypocritical. To the man of the world it will sound a truism to say that we do not get rid of vice by driving it out of sight, but to the Puritan fanatic this remark still sounds as paradoxical as one of Wilde's epigrams.

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With this essay of Mr. Waugh's one should not forget to compare an essay by Hubert Crackanthorpe with a similar title, which appeared in Volume II of *The Yellow Book*. Crackanthorpe pointed out, justly enough, that "the truth is, and, despite Mr. Waugh, we are near recognition of it, that nowadays there is but scanty merit in the mere selection of any particular subject, however ingenious or daring it may appear at first sight; that a man is not an artist simply because he writes about heredity or the *demi-monde*; that to call a spade a spade requires no extraordinary literary gift; and that the essential is contained in the frank, fearless acceptance by every man of his artistic temperament with its qualities and its flaws."

In saying this Crackanthorpe was not right in one respect. We have not yet fully recognised this truth; for many modern writers do appear to be thought artists simply because they are daring enough to call a spade a spade and to write about the *demi-monde*. Many of our modern authors, however, do not even write about the *demi-monde*; they content themselves with the sexual affairs of women who have no right to be included in this category. There is a French saying, "Qui connaît le demi-monde,

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connaît tout le monde." Our modern writers are in most cases acquainted with neither.

Among the earlier reputations secured on *The Yellow Book* perhaps the most important was that of Mr. Max Beerbohm. His *Defence of Cosmetics* met with the cordial disapproval of the critics, which gave the author the opportunity of putting a pungent reply in No. 2 in the form of a letter to the editor. Further ire seems to have been aroused among the philistines, and very naturally, by a sentence in this letter: "Personally I cannot conceive how any artist can be hurt by remarks dropped from a garret into a gutter, yet it is incontestable that many illustrious artists have so been hurt." After this Mr. Beerbohm proceeds to trounce his enemies in his usual style, but it is to be feared that the dead weight of philistine stupidity has since proved too much even for his razor-like wit. We must not forget, too, Mr. Beerbohm's caricature of George IV in No. 3 of *The Yellow Book*, and the characteristic article accompanying the drawing; but there is another essay of his of even greater value and interest in No. 4, an essay which is only second in brilliancy to the *Defence of Cosmetics*. This essay is entitled "1880," and in it the writer

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speaks of the remoteness of the period and the difficulty of obtaining information in regard to it. It is in this essay that Mr. Beerbohm refers to Wilde as having discovered beauty, but there is a much more mordant passage, and one which could certainly not be paralleled in any of our present-day publications.

The period of 1880 and of the few years immediately succeeding it must always be memorable to us, for it marks a great change in the constitution of Society. It would seem that during the five or six years which preceded it, the "upper ten thousand," as they were somewhat quaintly called by the journalists of the day, had taken a somewhat more frigid tone. The Prince of Wales had inclined for a time to be more restful after the ravages of his youth. The continued seclusion of Queen Victoria, who during these years was engaged upon that superb work of introspection and analysis, *More Leaves from the Highlands*, had begun to tell upon the social system.

It would be difficult to find a more delightful bit of satire. To match it, indeed, one would have to go to France, and I do not think that any higher compliment can be paid to Mr. Beerbohm than this.

Many of those who have read Mr. Lionel Johnson's very sound book on the art of Thomas Hardy may not perhaps be aware that he was another writer who belonged to *The Yellow*

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*Book* set, and through *The Yellow Book* and the other writers associated with it he made a considerable name before his premature death. One of the best essays he wrote in the nineties was a contribution to No. 3 of *The Yellow Book*, entitled *Tobacco Clouds* :

Tobacco Clouds : cloud upon cloud : and if I were to think that an image of life can lie in wreathing blue tobacco-smoke, pleasant were the life so fancied. Its fair changes in air, its gentle motions, its quiet dying out and away at last, should symbolise something more than perfect idleness. Cloud upon cloud : and I will think as I have said : it is amusing to think so.

It is that death out and away upon the air which charms me : charms more than the manner of the blown red rose, full after dew at morning, upon the grass at sunset. The clouds' end, their death in air, fills me with the very beauty of desire ; it has no violence in it, and it is almost invisible. Think of it ! While the cloud lived it was seemly and various ; and with a graceful change it passed away : the image of a reasonable life is there, hanging among tobacco clouds. An image and a test : an image, because elaborated by fancy : a true and appalling image, and so, to my present way of life, a test. . . .

Call me, my dear friend, what reproachful name you please, but by your leave the world is better for my cheerfulness. True, should the terrible issues come upon me, demanding high courage and finding but good temper, then give me your prayers, for I have my misdoubts. Till then let me cultivate my place in life, nurturing its comelier flowers ; taking the little things of time with a grateful relish and a

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mind at rest. So hours and years pass into hours and years, gently, and surely, and orderly; as these clouds, grey and blue clouds, of tobacco smoke pass up to the air and away upon the wind; incense of a goodly savour, cheering the thoughts of my heart before passing away, to disappear at last.

There is certainly a very peculiar charm in this writing. One thinks in vain of any other modern English author with whom Lionel Johnson can adequately be compared. He seeks sentences as Pater sought words. In Pater's case, however, the sentences became collections of mosaic and the joinings are in many cases only too clearly visible. In Lionel Johnson's work this is not so. As readers of his book on Thomas Hardy will remember, he unites sound critical ideas to a harmonious and well-polished style; even though in this one great critical work of his he was inclined to be over-elaborate in the matter of references and names. That Lionel Johnson should have given way to drink and died in his early thirties is but one of the tragedies of this literary period.

It is, I am sure, difficult for any one who reads *The Yellow Book* to fail to be impressed by John Davidson's poem *Thirty Bob a Week*, contributed to No. 2. The concluding final verse of one stanza is one of his happiest efforts :

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But you'll never hear *her* do a growl, or whine,  
For she's made of flint and roses very odd ;  
And I've got to cut my meaning rather fine  
Or I'd blubber, for *I'm* made of greens and sod :  
So p'raps we are in hell for all that I can tell,  
And lost and damned and served up hot to God.

Amongst various miscellaneous articles and stories contributed to *The Yellow Book* must be mentioned Harland's *Rosemary for Remembrance*, in No. 5. The pathetic story of the little Italian girl is told almost without an artistic flaw. In No. 4 there is an excellent article on Stendhal, by Norman Hapgood. *The Foolish Virgin*, in No. 8, is a very fair specimen of Gissing, and there are several contributions of course by Ella d'Arcy. It may seem not a little amusing to us at the present day to think that Austin Dobson, Dolf Wyllarde, and Vernon Lee appeared between the same covers as Max Beerbohm, Henry Harland, and Ernest Dowson.

In the artistic section there was much work, good, bad, and indifferent, by various artists, well known and otherwise—Walter Crane, Muirhead Bone, E. J. Sullivan, Walter Sickert, and Patten Wilson, to take a few names at a venture. But Beardsley, of course, dominated them all. Perhaps his most characteristic draw-

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ing in *The Yellow Book* series is the portrait of himself in No. 3.

No. 13, the last issue of *The Yellow Book*, presents a strange and rather sudden contrast to No. 1. There is nothing in the final volume which can excite any particular feeling of enthusiasm in the critic. There is a somewhat laboured paper on Molière, by J. M. Robertson ; but neither Mr. W. B. Yeats nor Mr. le Gallienne is in particularly good form. We have passed, too, from characteristic drawings by Beardsley to such sentimental studies as E. S. Harper's "The Missing Boat in Sight" or Mr. Housman's "Barren Love." None of the artistic efforts in the latter issues of *The Yellow Book* can be compared with such typical studies by Beardsley as "The Repentance of Mrs. —," in No. 4, or his "Wagnerites" in No. 3. In the last volume in particular there is nothing distinctive either in the literary or the artistic section ; we find nothing in it that calls for any special comment, and we would willingly give the combined efforts of the nine artists whose names appear on the title-page for any one of Beardsley's worst drawings.

Of all those writers who made their reputations or became chiefly known through their



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connection with *The Yellow Book*, probably the most important were Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson, and Mr. Max Beerbohm. It has been rightly said by Mr. Blaikie Murdoch that the mantle of Pater fell upon Mr. Symons rather than on any one else, and we see the result no doubt in Mr. Symons's prose style, which is full of Pater's subtlety. This remark applies, at all events, to Mr. Symons's critical and interpretative essays—*Cities*, for example, or the *Studies in Prose and Verse*; but when occasion arose he could also write with a vigour which would probably have made Pater very uneasy. Look at the editorial note to the second number of *The Savoy*:

In presenting to the public the second number of *The Savoy*, I wish to thank the critics of the press for the flattering reception which they have given to No. 1. That reception has been none the less flattering because it has been for the most part unfavourable. Any new endeavour lends itself alike by its merits and by its defects to the disapproval of the larger number of people, and it is always possible to learn from any vigorously expressed denunciation, not perhaps what the utterer intended should be learned. I confess cheerfully that I have learned much from the newspaper criticisms of the first number of *The Savoy*. It is with confidence that I anticipate no less instruction from the criticisms which I shall have the pleasure of reading on the number now issued.

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This is sufficiently direct and to the point, and it says much for Mr. Symons's versatility that he was at the same time capable of seeking his poetical subjects in the moods of men, to use his own words, and of rendering them with such fidelity and subtlety in his poems. Take for example the piece entitled *On the Stage in London Nights* :

Lights, in a multi-coloured mist,  
From indigo to amethyst,  
A whirling mist of multi-coloured lights ;  
And after, wigs and tights,  
Then faces, then a glimpse of profiles, then  
Eyes, and a mist again ;  
And rouge, and always tights, and wigs and tights.

You see the ballet so, and so  
From amethyst to indigo,  
You see a dance of phantoms, but I see  
A girl, who smiles to me ;  
Her cheeks, across the rouge, and in her eyes  
I know what memories,  
What memories and messages for me.

There is undoubted subtlety in this : "a gem-like flame " of real poetry cast for an instant on the stage. And for the equally subtle interpretation of another scene and mood, what could be better than *Autumn Twilight* ?

The long September evening dies  
In mist along the fields and lanes ;  
Only a few faint stars surprise  
The lingering twilight as it wanes.

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Night creeps across the darkening vale ;  
On the horizon tree by tree  
Fades into shadowy skies as pale  
As moonlight on a shadowy sea.

And, down the mist-enfolded lanes,  
Grown pensive now with evening,  
See, lingering as the twilight wanes,  
Lover with lover wandering.

Possibly, however, Mr. Symons is particularly happy in dealing with night in Venice. There is an excellent little cameo beginning "Night, and the silence of the night, In Venice ; far away a song" ; but as an example of pure subtlety and beauty I will quote *Veneta Marina* :

The mists rise white to the stars,  
White on the night of the sky,  
Out of the waters' night,  
And the stars lean down to them white.  
Ah ! how the stars seem nigh ;  
How far away are the stars !

And I too under the stars,  
Alone with the night again,  
And the waters' monotone ;  
I and the night alone,  
And the world and the ways of men  
Farther from me than the stars.

Moods are innumerable, yet, in reading over Mr. Symons's work we feel that he has touched upon them all. I must quote one more example of his manner : those four lines which open the

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poem entitled *New Year's Eve*, in No. 2 of *The Savoy* :

We heard the bells of midnight burying the year.

Then the night poured its silent waters over us.

And then in the vague darkness, faint and tremulous,  
Time paused ; then the night filled with sound ; morning  
was here.

It is not possible within the space of a few pages to do justice to Mr. Symons's prose work. I have already referred to his debt to Pater, and this is a debt which Mr. Symons himself did not overlook when he wrote a glowing account of his work for the last number of *The Savoy*. Mr. Symons's view of Pater is opposed to mine, for he appears to be favourable to a type of literature and thought which a classicist does not easily tolerate. I am bound to admit, however, that within the limits of his romanticism, which Mr. Symons holds well in check, he has written one of the best criticisms on Pater ever penned : and with this admission let us hope that room will be found for the views of both of us in the domain of critical interpretation. Referring to *Marius*, Mr. Symons says :

In this book, and in the *Imaginary Portraits* of three years later—which seems to me to show his imaginative and artistic faculties at their point of most perfect

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fusion—Pater has not endeavoured to create characters, in whom the flesh and blood should seem to be that of life itself; he had not the energy of creation, and he was content with a more shadowy life than theirs for the children of his dreams. What he has done is to give a concrete form to abstract ideas; to represent certain types of character, to trace certain developments, in the picturesque form of narrative; to which, indeed, the term portrait is very happily applied; for the method is that of a very patient and elaborate brushwork, in which the touches which go to form the likeness are so fine that it is difficult to see quite their individual value, until, the end being reached, the whole picture starts out before you. Each, with perhaps one exception, is the study of a soul, or rather of a consciousness; such a study as might be made by simply looking within, and projecting now this now that side of oneself on an exterior plane. I do not mean to say that I attribute to Pater himself the philosophical theories of Sebastian van Storck, or the artistic ideals of Duke Carl of Rosenmold. I mean that the attitude of mind, the outlook, in the most general sense, is always limited and directed in a certain way, giving one always the picture of a delicate, subtle, aspiring, unsatisfied personality, open to all impressions, living chiefly by sensations, little anxious to reap any of the rich harvest of its intangible but keenly possessed gains; a personality withdrawn from action, which it despises or dreads, solitary with its ideals, in the circle of its "exquisite moments" in the Palace of Art, where it is never quite at rest.

Once more I emphasise the fact that Mr. Symons's criticism of Pater would hardly be upheld by modern Continental standards. This,

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I hope, will not prevent the modern critic from doing justice to the undeniably literary qualities of his prose.

Like all poets, Mr. Symons could not write without shocking somebody, and it was not long before he was belaboured by the middle-class mind of his day ; but he made a fine reply to his critics in the preface to the second edition of *London Nights* : a reply which is of permanent value and not merely applicable to one particular period or phase of literature in the world's history. I refer more particularly to the following passage :

I have been attacked on the grounds of morality, and by people who, in condemning my book, not because it is bad art, but because they think it bad morality, forget that they are confusing moral and artistic judgments and limiting art without aiding morality. I contend on behalf of the liberty of art, and I deny that morals have any right of jurisdiction over it. Art may be served by morality, it can never be its servant. For the principles of art are eternal, while the principles of morality fluctuate with the ebb and flow of the ages.

Generally speaking it hardly seems to me that Mr. Symons's work has improved since the *Savoy* period ; rather the contrary. He is in a different category from Mr. Austin Dobson or Mr. Edmund Gosse, but like them he would

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appear to have lost much of the freshness and keenness of insight which distinguished his earlier work. One important exception, however, must be made: the book on William Blake is one of the finest pieces of critical writing in recent years. It will, I hope, be taken as a compliment when I say that I can compare it only to Lionel Johnson's book on the art of Thomas Hardy.

Another of *The Yellow Book* band was Hubert Crackanthorpe, to whose work justice has not yet been done. His work, in fact, is not very generally known even in literary circles, and it has in consequence been less discussed than its merits deserve. Crackanthorpe died young; and Mr. Henry James, in his introduction to the *Last Studies*, tells us that the young writer was "so fond of movement and sport, of the open air of life and of the idea of immediate, easy, 'healthy' adventure, that his natural vocation might have seemed rather a long ride away into a world of exhilarating exposure, of merely material romance." The very opposite qualities are seen in Crackanthorpe's work. He has a piercing eye for the cruel side of life, the cruel aspects of everyday events. He is frankly a disciple of Guy de Maupassant; and

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he has certainly shown the influence of the French author in his style. A few suggestive sentences, and his characters are put before us. More than that : their very souls are laid bare ; his men and women stand in front of us naked, raw. It is realism, but realism of a high order. No ordinary writer could do it. Aunt Lisbet never appears on the scene in person ; but we know her through and through, nevertheless. In a few pages we know why a girl like Lilly would naturally fall in love with a man like Maurice Radford ; and we know, too, why she would equally naturally give up Maurice for Adrian Safford. And then those few pregnant pages in which her downfall is traced—concisely, clearly, firmly, without a note of sentimentality, without a note of pity, without a word of justification or condemnation !

Or, again, Rosa Blencarn, Anthony Garstin's mother, and Anthony Garstin himself : what an untoward ending to a courtship, what a dramatic scene with the girl on the rocky slope, and what a harrowing scene with the mother to finish the story ! And Oswald and Letty in the short sketch *A Conflict of Egoisms*—Vivian Marston—Frank Gorridge and his wife : they are all distinctive characters ; they are de-



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picted on paper with a literary skill which is astounding in so young a writer. But they have the fatal defect of ugliness; they degrade life.

A classicist will object to art for art's sake. He will equally object to realism for realism's sake. Both art and realism must serve life. Any artist who makes use of art and realism for this end has justified their existence and his own. The Wilde school, seeing art apart from life, cannot meet with our approval; but neither can the sordid ugliness of Crackanthorpe's sketches, despite their fine literary presentation. They do not elevate the type man; they degrade it. Wilde's propaganda in behalf of beauty is at the opposite extreme to Crackanthorpe's movement in behalf of ugliness. It is impossible for any classicist to rise from a perusal of *Sentimental Studies*, *Wreckage*, or the *Last Studies* without a feeling of physical and mental repugnance towards the events portrayed in them and towards the characters who move across the pages. We are in the midst of a miasma; or rather we are under the influence of a drug that dulls our senses to the extent of preventing us from distinguishing between beauty and its contrary. At the same time we are fascinated by Crackan-

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thorpe's style. It is French. It is Maupassant speaking to us in our own language ; but it is the sordid, bleak Maupassant. We may adapt Wilde's phrase and say that we see the verities dancing on the tight-rope in Crackanthorpe's works ; but we have an uneasy feeling that we, too, are dancing on the tight-rope, our nerves strained to the highest pitch.

It is true that there are one or two exceptions. In *Vignettes*, for example, the characters do not, to use an excellent phrase of Mr. Wells, crawl along drain-pipes till they die. But they are often inartistic, like "our lady of the Lane" :

Whenever the London sun touches the small, dusky shops with a jumble of begrimed colour—the old gold and scarlet of hanging meat ; the metallic green of mature cabbages ; the wavering russet of piled potatoes ; the sharp white of fly-bills, pasted all awry—then the moment to see her is come. You will find her, bareheaded and touzled ; her dingy, peaked shawl hanging down her back, and in front the bellying expanse of her soiled apron ; blocking the pavement ; established by her own corner of the Lane, all littered with the cries of children, and the fitful throbbing of the asphalte beneath the hollow hammering of hoofs.

She always carries a baby by her breast ; her bare forearms are as bulky as any man's ; in her eyes is a froward scowl ; and, when she laughs, it is with a harsh, strident gaiety. But she never fails to wear her squalid portliness with a robust and defiant

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dignity, that makes her figure definitely symbolic of Cockney maternity.

But *Paris in October* is better than this :

Paris in October—all white and a-glitter under a cold, sparkling sky, and the trees of the boulevards trembling their frail, russet leaves ; garish, petulant Paris ; complacently content with her sauntering crowds, her monotonous arrangements in pink and white and blue ; ever busied with her own publicity, her tiresome, obvious vice, and her parochial modernity coquetting with cosmopolitanism. . . .

The four dots have meaning ; and how well is the Paris of our days summed up in that last phrase : “ parochial modernity coquetting with cosmopolitanism ” ! And then think what a scene is summed up in these few lines :

It was a little street, shabbily symmetrical—a double row of insignificant, dingy-brick houses. Muffled in the dusk of the fading winter afternoon, it seemed sunk in squalid listless slumber. In the distance a church-bell was tolling its joyless mechanical Sunday tale.

A man stood in the roadway, droning the words of a hymn-tune. He was old and decayed and sluttish ; he wore an ancient, baggy frock-coat, and, through the cracks in his boots you could see the red flesh of his feet. His gait was starved and timid : the touch of the air was very bitter. And when he had finished his singing, he remained gazing up at the rows of lifeless windows, with a look of dull expectancy in his bloodshot, watery eyes.

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In work like this Crackanthorpe was perfect ; and one wishes that he had left more books of the *Vignettes* than of the *Wreckage* type. For many of the vignettes are beautiful, and ugliness cannot, from the artistic point of view, be tolerated. And if there are beautiful subjects to choose from there is no special reason why an artist of Crackanthorpe's qualifications should deliberately choose ugly ones. Even when writing about Naples he does not forget to remind us of the garbage in the Strada del Porto and the squalidness of the Strada del Chiaia ; though he atones for this in one of the best vignettes he ever wrote, *From Posilipo* :

Heaped beneath us all Naples, white and motionless in the silent blaze of the midday sun ; circling the bay, still and smooth and blue as the sky above, a misty line of white villages ; dark, velvety shadows draping the hills ; on the horizon, rising abruptly, Capri's notched silhouette—tout semble suer la beauté—la bonne et franche beauté criarde des pays chauds européens.

Naples at noon is a splendid artistic subject, and Crackanthorpe has here done justice to it in his own fashion. But as a general rule he preferred to describe the cruelty of things. The *Vignettes* are, as a whole, excellent. In his other books, however, we lie motionless, and

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without an anæsthetic, while the firm hand of the literary surgeon dissects our very soul.

I have already referred to Max Beerbohm in connection with *The Yellow Book*, quoting a specimen or two of his writing. His admirers will naturally set more store by his earlier works than by such a book as *Zuleika Dobson*. It is almost impossible to imagine that this latter book was written by the brilliant author of *The Defence of Cosmetics* and "1880." I do not think that Mr. Beerbohm should have attempted a long novel; his strength lies rather in the short sketches such as we find collected from various periodicals in such volumes as *The Works of Max Beerbohm, More, and Yet Again*. His theatrical criticisms for *The Saturday Review*, again, did not show him at his best. Unlike Shaw, he left behind him no particular tradition. But where he finds a subject to suit his pen he is admirable and altogether distinctive—not distinctive in the sense in which we speak of Crackanthorpe or Wilde as distinctive; but distinctive as a result of the frank humour which enters into his style and comes upon us at unexpected places—not wittiness, as in the case of Whistler; not paradoxes, as in the case of Wilde: but simply humour.

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The essay on *The House of Commons Manner* is a fairly representative one. The Strangers' Gallery, as we all know, is kept in order by certain men in uniform, who tap us on the shoulder if we make a fuss. Who but Max would have thought of referring to these people as "courteous, magpie-like officials"? Yet what other phrase ever described them so well: how magpie-like they are, as they seem to flutter in from nowhere in particular and breathe the unmistakable intimation that the offending party must depart! Let Max continue:

Years ago, when to be a member of the House of Commons was to be (or to deem one's self) a personage of great importance, the debates were conducted with a keen eye to effect. Members who had a sense of beauty made their speeches beautiful, and even those to whom it was denied did their best. Grace of ample gesture was cultivated, and sonorous elocution, and lucid ordering of ideas, and noble language. In fact, there was a school of oratory. This is no mere superstition, bred of man's innate tendency to exalt the past above the present. It is a fact that can easily be verified through contemporary records. It is a fact which I myself have verified in the House with my own eyes and ears. More than once I heard there—and it was a pleasure and privilege to hear—a speech made by Sir William Harcourt. And from his speeches I was able to deduce the manner of his coevals and his forerunners. Long past his prime he was, and bearing up with very visible effort against his years. An almost extinct volcano! But sufficient

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to imagination these glimpses of the glow that had been, and the sight of these last poor rivulets of the old lava. An almost extinct volcano, but majestic among mole-hills!

This at once gives us the "atmosphere." And after a reference to the low level of the House of Commons debates, Max goes on to say:

No one supposes that in a congeries of—how many?—six hundred and seventy men, chosen by the British public, there will be a very high average of mental capacity. If any one were so sanguine, a glance at the faces of our Conscript Fathers along the benches would soon bleed him. (I have no doubt that the custom of wearing hats in the House originated in the members' unwillingness to let strangers spy down on the shapes of their heads.) But it is not unreasonable to expect that the more active of these gentlemen will, through constant practice, not only in the Senate, but also at elections and public dinners and so forth, have acquired a rough-and-ready professionalism in the art of speaking. It is not unreasonable to expect that they will be fairly fluent—fairly capable of arranging in logical sequence such ideas as they may have formed, and of reeling out words more or less expressive of these ideas. Well! certain of the Irishmen, certain of the Welshmen, proceed easily enough. But oh! those Saxon others! Look at them, hark at them, poor dears! See them clutching at their coats, and shuffling from foot to foot in travail, while their ideas—ridiculous mice, for the most part—get jerked painfully out somehow and anyhow. "It seems to me that the Right—the honourable member for—er—er (*the speaker dives to be prompted*)—yes, of course—South Clapham—er—(*temporising*)

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the southern division of Clapham—(*long pause ; his lips form the words "Where was I?"*)—oh, yes, the honourable gentleman the member for South Clapham seems to me to me—to *be*—in the position of one who, whilst the facts on which his *propo—supposition* are based—er—may or may not be in themselves acc—correct (*gasps*)—yet inasmuch—because—nevertheless . . . I should say rather—er—what it comes to is this: the honourable member for North—*South* Clapham seems to be labouring under a total, an entire, a complete (*emphatic gesture, which throws him off his tack*)—a contire—a *complete* distill—misunderstanding of the things which he himself relies on as—as—as a backing-up of the things that he would have us take or—er—accept and receive as the right sort of reduction—*deduction* from the facts of . . . in fact, from the facts of the case." Then the poor dear heaves a deep sigh of relief, which is drowned by other members in a hideous cachinnation meant to express mirth.

There is plenty of room for artistic satire about the House of Commons, and this is an excellent model of how such satire might be written. If Crackanthorpe had been writing on the subject he would have made the scene much more realistic and much less good-natured. Nevertheless, one cannot help wishing that Crackanthorpe had chosen such a scene rather than the scene on the parapet of the Embankment where a "respectable married woman" is offered half a crown to break her vows of fidelity for the space of sixty minutes.



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Contrast Max and Crackanthorpe again. Max is indifferent to the ugliness of the streets through which he passes, and the sordidness or wretchedness of the people on them. He is impressed more by the "atmosphere" and the names of the thoroughfares, so he writes an essay on the naming of streets. He feels the difference between "(say) Hill Street and Pont Street, High Street Kensington and High Street Notting Hill, Fleet Street and the Strand."

In every one of these thoroughfares my mood and my manner are differently affected. In Hill Street, instinctively, I walk very slowly—sometimes even with a slight limp, as one recovering from an accident in the hunting-field. I feel very well bred there, and, though not clever, very proud, and quick to resent any familiarity from those whom elsewhere I should regard as my equals. In Pont Street my demeanour is not so calm and measured. I feel less sure of myself and adopt a slight swagger. In High Street, Kensington, I find myself dapper and respectable, with a timid leaning to the fine arts. In High Street, Notting Hill, I become frankly common. Fleet Street fills me with a conviction that if I don't make haste I shall be jeopardising the national welfare. The Strand utterly unmans me, leaving me with only two sensations: (1) a regret that I have made such a mess of my life; (2) a craving for alcohol. These are but a few instances. If I had time, I could show you that every street known to me in London has a definite effect on me, and that no two streets have exactly the same effect.

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Mention of the Strand recalls the fact that Crackanthorpe and Max met on common ground here; for the former also wrote about the Strand in his *Vignettes*, not humorously, however, but with a touch of the melancholy which seemed to permeate the souls of so many writers of the time:

The City disgorges.

All along the Strand, down the great, ebbing tide, the omnibuses, a congested press of gaudy craft, drift westwards, jostling and jamming their tall, loaded decks, with a clanking of chains, a rumble of lumbering wheels, a thudding of quick-loosed brakes, a humming of hammering hoofs. . . .

The empty hansoms slink silently past; the street hawkers—a long row of dingy figures—line the pavement-edge; troops of frenzied newsboys dart yelling through the traffic; and here and there a sullen-faced woman struggles to stem the tide of men.

Somewhere, behind Pall Mall, unheeded the sun has set: the sky is powdered with crimson dust; one by one the shops gleam out, blazing their windows of burnished glass; the twilight throbs with a ceaseless shuffle of hurrying feet; and over all things hovers the spirit of London's grim unrest.

We might take Beerbohm in any one of his essays and he is always the same—always penetrating, always humorous, and almost always with something original to say; always with the *mot juste*. Note, for example, the use of the word “bleed” in the second quota-

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tion from him given above. Nor, in concluding this short reference to Max, can we afford to forget that he was once referred to as one of the three cleverest young men in London. The expression is now out of date so far as the locality is concerned ; for Mr. G. K. Chesterton, one of the other two, has buried himself in the country and become a parish constable. Mr. Belloc is still with us ; but a new generation of clever young men is beginning to come to the front.

Three more names connected with *The Yellow Book* and Mr. John Lane have still to be mentioned—Lionel Johnson, Ernest Dowson, and Henry Harland.

Harland was another of the school whose career was made pathetic by constant illness and comparatively early death. He shared with his countryman, Whistler, some youthful knowledge of St. Petersburg, where he was born in March 1861. When his family removed to New York, some years later, young Henry Harland secured an appointment in the surrogate, one of the legal departments of New York State, and while here he wrote his early works under the name of Sidney Luska. They dealt chiefly with Jewish life in America ; but *Mrs.*

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*Peixada, The Land of Love, or My Uncle Florimond* need not detain us when we think of *The Cardinal's Snuff-Box* or *My Friend Prospero*.

Partly on account of his delicate health Harland returned to Europe and worked as a journalist in England. His reputation began with *The Yellow Book* period; for he was, as I have already remarked, the literary editor of this celebrated periodical; and to his keen appreciation of what was good and new in literature so many writers owe the reputations which they afterwards secured. To the later numbers of *The Yellow Book* Harland contributed the famous series of articles signed "The Yellow Dwarf," which caused much speculation on their appearance. Their authorship was ascribed to men so different as Max Beerbohm and Austin Dobson, surely a sufficient proof that the critics of the period had but a small notion of what constituted style in writing.

All this time, however, Harland was dogged by ill-health, and he finally took up his residence in Italy. He once more began to write novels after the suspension of *The Yellow Book*, and in 1900 we had *The Cardinal's Snuff-Box*, followed in 1902 by *The Lady Paramount*.

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These two books, with *My Friend Prospero*, may be reckoned as the best of his works. They are particularly distinguished by the characteristic feature of Harland's style—a peculiarly light, naïve touch of humour; and his scenes from Italian life have seldom been equalled for brilliancy and conciseness of description. Who but Harland could have written of the weeping cow? You remember the scene in *The Cardinal's Snuff-Box*; the cow has had her calf taken away, and Marietta calls Peter out to watch her weeping, "like a Christian."

Peter looked—and sure enough, from the poor cow's eyes tears were falling steadily, rapidly; big limpid tears that trickled down her cheek, her great homely, hairy cheek, and dropped on the grass; tears of helpless pain, uncomprehending endurance. "Why have they done this thing to me?" they seemed dumbly to cry.

"Have you ever seen a cow weep before? It is comical, at least?" demanded Marietta, exultant.

"Comical?" Peter gasped. "Comical!" he groaned.

But then he spoke to the cow. "Poor dear—poor dear!" he repeated. He patted her soft warm neck, and scratched her between the horns and along the dewlap. "Poor dear—poor dear!"

The cow lifted up her head, and rested her great chin on Peter's shoulder, breathing upon his face.

"Yes, you know that we are companions in misery,

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don't you?" he said. . . . "And now you must try to pull yourself together. It's no good crying. And, besides, there are more calves in the sea than have ever been taken from it. You'll have a much handsomer and fatter one next time. And besides, you must remember that your loss subserves some one else's gain—the farmer would never have done it if it hadn't been to his advantage. If you're an altruist, that should comfort you. And you mustn't mind Marietta—you mustn't mind her laughter. Marietta is a Latin. The Latin conception of what is laughable differs by the whole span of heaven from the Teuton. You and I are Teutons."

"Teutons?" questioned Marietta, wrinkling her brow.

"Yes—Germanic," said he.

"But I thought the Signorino was English?"

"So he is."

"But the cow is not Germanic. White, with black horns, that is the purest Roman breed, Signorino."

"*Fa niente*," he instructed her. "Cows and Englishmen, and all such sentimental cattle, including Germans, are Germanic. Italians are Latin—with a touch of the Goth and Vandal. Lions and tigers fight because they're Mohammedans. Dogs still bear without abuse the grand old name of Sycophant. Cats are of the princely line of Persia, and worship fire, fish, and flattery—as you may have noticed. Geese belong indifferently to any race you like—they are cosmopolitans; and I've known here and there a person who, without distinction of nationality, was a duck."

And meanwhile the cow stood there, with her head on his shoulder, silently weeping, weeping. He gave her a farewell rub along the nose.

Not even the Italian climate, however, could

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counterbalance Harland's delicate constitution, and he died at San Remo towards the end of December 1905. His career was cut short just at a time when he might have continued to give us of his best work ; but, although his death was premature, he had lived ten years longer than Lionel Johnson, one of the best-read and most penetrating critics of the day. I have already illustrated his subtle style by a quotation from *Tobacco Clouds* in *The Yellow Book* ; but his *Art of Thomas Hardy* is worth more than merely a passing reference. It alone, perhaps, of all Johnson's few works, enables us to gauge the extent of his reading and the diversity of his knowledge of different periods of English literature, from the end of the seventeenth century onwards. He appears to have been particularly influenced by eighteenth-century literature, if we may judge not only from his references but also from his eighteenth-century use of the comma. He knows his Dr. Johnson, his Richardson, and his Fielding ; but not more than he knows George Eliot, Meredith, and the man he wrote about, Thomas Hardy. A book which is known to all lovers of first-class criticism cannot be summed up here in a quotation or two ; but

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I will at all events give a passage which is of interest even when detached from its context. It is from the first chapter of his book on Hardy.

There are theorists, who maintain the absolute independence of the artist; his "unchartered freedom" from all traditions, and from all influences; his isolated station, his spontaneous powers: and there are theorists, who maintain the entire dependence of the artist upon hereditary impulse, upon circumstantial influence, upon local forces, and upon social tendencies; they rob him of his originality, that they may fit him into their theory. The great name of Carlyle, and the distinguished name of M. Taine, may stand sponsors for the two doctrines. And yet the truth would seem to lie between these two desperate extremities, of plenary inspiration and of mechanical necessity: between that doctrine, which detaches the artist from his fellow men; and that doctrine, which forbids them to see, even in the artist, an example of free and creative will. At the least, it is of interest to consider the middle position: to contemplate the artist, the man of letters, in his relation to past times and to his own, with something of a Positivist spirit, tempered by a saving disbelief in Positivism. The result of such a meditation might be of this kind; with due allowance for "accidental variations."

The supreme duties of the artist toward his art, as of all workmen toward their work, are two in number, but of one kind: a duty of reverence, of fidelity, of understanding, toward the old, great masters; and a duty of reverence, of fidelity, of understanding, toward the living age and the living artist. There are times when the two duties are



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hard to reconcile ; when the artistic conscience must put forth all its honest casuistry, and determine the true solution with laborious care.

This is a passage which all critics must keep in mind, a passage laying down sound elemental principles, and one, therefore, of permanent value.

We have, too, several poems by Lionel Johnson. He is not so subtle in his interpretation of moods as Symons or Dowson ; but nevertheless many of his short pieces have genuine merit and charm—such lines, for example, as *Ash-Wednesday* :

IN MEMORIAM: ERNEST DOWSON.

*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es !*

To-day the cross of ashes marks my brow :

Yesterday, laid to solemn sleep wert thou,

O dear to me of old, and dearer now !

*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es !*

*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es !*

And all the subtle beauty of that face,

With all its winning, all its wistful grace,

Fades in the consecrated stilly place :

*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es !*

*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es !*

The visible vehement earth remains to me :

The visionary quiet land holds thee :

But what shall separate such friends as we ?

*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es !*

*The Precept of Silence*, again, is almost worthy of Mr. Symons :

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I know you : solitary griefs,  
Desolate passions, aching hours  
I know you : tremulous beliefs,  
Agonized hopes, and ashen flowers !

The winds are sometimes sad to me ;  
The starry spaces, full of fear :  
Mine is the sorrow on the sea,  
And mine the sigh of places drear.

Some players upon plaintive strings  
Publish their wistfulness abroad :  
I have not spoken of these things,  
Save to one man, and unto God.

There remains Dowson. It is useless, it seems to me, to essay the task of placing him, Symons, and Davidson in any precise order. Each had his distinctive merits—fortunately we may still use the present tense of Mr. Symons—and Dowson's have been described admirably by Mr. Symons himself. He was first and foremost a poet : his short stories in *The Savoy* are fine models, and the critic will enjoy looking through *A Comedy of Masks*, written in collaboration with Mr. Arthur Moore, and picking out the traces of Dowson's hand. But it is as a poet that he will live : not even his book *Stories and Studies in Sentiment* raises him so high as a prose-writer as his poetical works raise him as a poet. Let Mr. Symons sum up his merits and charm :

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## THE "YELLOW BOOK" SCHOOL

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There never was a poet to whom verse came more naturally, for the song's sake; his theories were all æsthetic, almost technical ones, such as a theory, indicated by his preference for the line of Poe ["the viol, the violet, and the vine"], that the letter "v" was the most beautiful of the letters, and could never be brought into verse too often. For any more abstract theories he had neither tolerance nor heed. Poetry as a philosophy did not exist for him; it existed solely as the loveliest of the arts. He loved the elegance of Horace, all that was most complex in the simplicity of Poe, most birdlike in the human melodies of Verlaine. He had the pure lyric gift, unweighted or unballasted by any other quality of mind or emotion; and a song, for him, was music first, and then whatever you please afterwards, so long as it suggested, never told, some delicate sentiment, a sigh or a caress; finding words, at times, as perfect as the words of a poem headed, "O Mors! quam amara est memoria tua homini pacem habenti in substantiis suis." There, surely, the music of silence speaks, if it has ever spoken. The words seem to tremble back into the silence which their whisper has interrupted, but not before they have created for us a mood, such a mood as the Venetian Pastoral of Giorgione renders in painting.

The poem referred to by Mr. Symons seems to me so finished and exquisite a production that I quote it in full:

Exceeding sorrow  
Consumeth my sad heart!  
Because to-morrow  
We must part,  
Now is exceeding sorrow  
All my part!

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Give over playing,  
Cast thy viol away :  
Merely laying  
Thine head my way :  
Prithee, give over playing,  
Grave or gay.

Be no word spoken ;  
Weep nothing : let a pale  
Silence, unbroken  
Silence prevail !  
Prithee, be no word spoken,  
Lest I fail !

Forget to-morrow !  
Weep nothing : only lay  
In silent sorrow  
Thine head my way :  
Let us forget to-morrow,  
This one day !

Mr. Symons goes on to say—I am quoting from his introduction to Dowson's volume of poems—that :

No one ever worshipped beauty more devoutly, and . . . he never admitted an emotion which he could not transfigure with beauty. He knew his limits only too well ; he knew that the deeper and graver things of life were for the most part outside the circle of his magic ; he passed them by, leaving much of himself unexpressed, because he would permit himself to express nothing imperfectly, or according to anything but his own conception of the dignity of poetry. In the lyric in which he has epitomised himself and his whole life, a lyric which is certainly one of the greatest lyrical poems of our time, " Non

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sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae," he has for once said everything, and he has said it to an intoxicating and perhaps immortal music :

Last night, ah, yesternight, betwixt her lips and mine  
There fell thy shadow, Cynara ! thy breath was shed  
Upon my soul between the kisses and the wine ;  
And I was desolate and sick of an old passion,  
    Yea, I was desolate and bowed my head :  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara ! in my fashion.

All night upon mine heart I felt her warm heart beat,  
Night-long within mine arms in love and sleep she lay ;  
Surely the kisses of her bought red mouth were sweet ;  
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,  
    When I awoke and found the dawn was gray ;  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara ! in my fashion.

I have forgot much, Cynara ! gone with the wind,  
Flung roses, roses riotously with the throng,  
Dancing, to put thy pale, lost lilies out of mind ;  
But I was desolate and sick of an old passion,  
    Yea, all the time, because the dance was long :  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara ! in my fashion.

I cried for madder music and for stronger wine,  
But when the feast is finished and the lamps expire,  
Then falls thy shadow, Cynara ! the night is thine ;  
And I am desolate and sick of an old passion,  
    Yea, hungry for the lips of my desire :  
I have been faithful to thee, Cynara ! in my fashion.

This is indeed immortal music—as immortal as Catullus in his happiest moments, and not to be compared with anything but a few of the finest efforts of the Latin poet.

Dowson's fate, too, was pathetic, tragic. A

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hopeless love almost unbalanced him, and he died in February 1900, in his thirty-third year. Feverish spells of drinking and drugging alternated with spells of hard literary work ; but the evil cravings conquered. Nature is hard on her most beloved children : if this truism still requires to be proved, I defy the most serene optimist to fail to be impressed by it when he considers the fate of some of these highly-gifted writers of the last generation of English literature.

## CHAPTER V

### AUBREY BEARDSLEY AND OTHERS

MR. AYMER VALLANCE has compiled a list of Aubrey Beardsley's drawings which extends over fifty odd pages. It is a long list, and the drawings include every conceivable subject that an artist can be expected to handle, and yet all the work which this list represents was accomplished in six years by a young man who died before his twenty-sixth birthday.

Aubrey Beardsley was born at Brighton in August 1872, but even at the early age of seven he showed symptoms of lung trouble. In spite of this he proved to be an eager scholar and made remarkable progress in his schooldays. He was truly what the biologist would be inclined to call a sporting plant. There appears to have been nothing in his parents to account for his remarkable artistic and little less remarkable literary gifts. When a comparative child he showed much aptitude for music and drawing, and at the age of eleven played at

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concerts with his sister. He had, Mr. Robert Ross tells us, a great knowledge of music and always spoke dogmatically on this subject. While attending Brighton Grammar School he caricatured his masters, and, contrary to the usual practice, did not get into trouble for doing so. About 1890 he gave up the obscurity of an insurance office in order to devote his time to illustrating Marlowe and Congreve. His first important commission came from Mr. Dent, who employed him to illustrate the *Morte d'Arthur*.

In view of Beardsley's artistic occupations and his state of health, which remained constantly delicate, the extent of his reading was certainly extraordinary. He read not merely superficially but thoroughly in almost every department of literature. He was undoubtedly anxious to achieve literary as well as artistic success, but it is on the whole fortunate that art secured the upper hand. His literary remains have been published, and all that can be said of them is that they are too brilliant, whether we take his poetry or his prose. Nevertheless we cannot withhold a considerable amount of admiration for one of his poetical attempts, viz., a translation from Catullus



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(Carmen CI) which appeared in No. 70 of *The Savoy* :

By ways remote and distant waters sped,  
Brother, to thy sad graveside am I come,  
That I may give the last gifts to the dead  
And vainly parley with thine ashes dumb :  
Since she who now bestows and now denies  
Hath ta'en thee, hapless brother, from mine eyes.

But lo ! these gifts, these heirlooms of past years  
Are made sad things to grace thy coffin's shell,  
Take them all drenched with a brother's tears,  
And, brother, for all time, hail and farewell !

The drawing which accompanies this translation cannot be said to be at all representative of Beardsley at his best, but there are plenty of others to choose from.

We may pass over Beardsley's artistic contributions to the *Pall Mall Budget*, *The Bee*, and *The Studio*, to mention the most important and distinctive series of drawings he ever undertook, viz., the illustrations to the English version of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, which Mr. John Lane published in 1894. It is perhaps this series of sixteen drawings which, more than anything else he did, shows Beardsley to have been unique in the world's art. In them he shows himself to be a thorough representative of what Mr. Ludovici calls

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the ruler-artist type. He does not illustrate the weird play in the sense in which we usually employ the word illustrate. He subordinates everything to his arbitrary artistic will. But what gives the drawings added piquancy and point is the fact that Beardsley did not like Wilde personally, and delicately satirized the play in his illustrations. We start off, indeed, with a very thinly-veiled satire on Wilde himself, as we can easily imagine him to have looked in the year 1893 or 1894. Those who have seen photographs of Wilde taken about this period cannot mistake "the woman in the moon." This picture, too, gives us a very fair notion of one aspect of Beardsley's powers as an artist. Only a dozen firm, yet fine and delicate strokes, and we have the two figures. As for the marvellous effects of the mere white and black patches, it is impossible to describe them. The curious upward twist given to the eyebrows of the woman in the moon, and the semicircles of almost invisible dots to represent the eyelashes, are other examples of Beardsley's genius. Note, too, the delicate tracery of the drawing on the title-page and on the page containing the list of the pictures. In this latter the arbitrary bend of

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the woman's body shows how infinitely far Beardsley was from being a mere realist.

To go through all the pictures in this way would be an artistic education in black and white. The unique design on the border of "The Peacock Skirt" is no more unique in its way than the design on "The Black Cape." In this latter drawing, too, mention should be made of the arbitrary placing of the left hand. The right hand is not so well drawn, but we forget this when we look at those three curls, with the middle one just a trifle longer than the other two. Notice again the arbitrary pose of "John and Salomé," with the sunflowers just breathing a hint of satire on the æsthetic movement. Consider, too, the marvellous effects obtained in "Enter Herodias." At first we merely see the jester's arm and hand, with the peculiar ruffle on the wrist, then the fearsome head and the enormous breasts. Little by little the Beardsleyesque details become revealed. Look at the middle candle, for example. In "The Dancer's Reward" we forget the bad drawing of the left hand in the wonderful hair and the expression on the face of Jokanaan's severed head. Observe the wonderful effects Beardsley produces by the

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use of a few dots round Jokanaan's eyes and Salomé's hair. In "The Toilette of Salomé (No. 1)" we have another example of Beardsley's arbitrariness. The scene lies in the East, centuries ago, but the toilet table contains a very modern powder puff and a bottle of perfume and two or three equally modern French novels on the lowest shelf. The costume, again, belongs presumably to the Queen Anne period. Yet all these incongruities are forgotten when we see the remarkable effect produced by the ensemble. "The Toilette of Salomé (No. 2)" is even more remarkable. The pose of the young slave with the coffee, the powder puff grasped in the finger and thumb of the left hand of Salomé's coiffeur, and the arbitrary pose of Salomé herself, especially the head, make up an entirely classic picture, the effect of which is enhanced by the circles of dots round the three shoes which are visible to us. "The Climax" brings us into the region of Beardsley's grotesques, and partly recalls the "Design from Lysistrata." Look at Jokanaan's wonderful hair and Salomé's equally wonderful curls. The tailpiece to Salomé is a classic.

For quite another side of Beardsley's art, we may turn to "The Battle of the Beaux and

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Belles," from *The Rape of the Lock*. The scene as a whole is no more beyond praise than the details which go to make it up. Look at the hair of the central figure and compare it with the folds of the window-blinds. Notice also the marvellous pattern on the back and seat of the fallen chair. But "The Baron's Prayer," in the same series, is equally worthy of mention. Observe the wonderful cloak and the arbitrary placing of the table and the marvellous trees.

I have already referred to Beardsley's connection with *The Yellow Book*, the art editorship of which his ill-health compelled him to give up when the fourth number had been published. By the end of 1895 he had sufficiently recovered to join Mr. Arthur Symons and Mr. Leonard Smithers in founding *The Savoy*. It was here that Beardsley published his unfinished novel *Under the Hill*, and to *The Savoy* also he contributed that wonderful portrait of himself with the extraordinary hands and brow. *Under the Hill* is simply a curious literary experiment, and, except purely as a matter of curiosity, we have no particular cause for regret that it remained unfinished.

Beardsley's health, however, continued to

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fail, and in March 1896, he caught a chill at Brussels, which considerably shortened a life that was from the first never destined to be a very long one. A year later he entered the Roman Catholic Church, and in another twelve-month (March 23, 1898) he died at Mentone.

Mr. Robert Ross has already taken the trouble to inform us that Beardsley was never a symbolist and never professed to be ; but a large section of the British public has nevertheless persisted in reading into his drawings meanings which the artist never intended to place there, meanings which would have horrified him. When Wilde laid down the dogma that criticism in art should simply be the starting-point of a new creation, he overlooked the inferiority of the non-artistic intellect. Beardsley's art, therefore, instead of being properly interpreted, was merely looked upon as being the pictorial representation of the state of mind which Wilde himself had so well described in prose in *Dorian Gray*. Those who took part in the æsthetic movement, in other words, were very generally thought to be a set of moral perverts, typically represented in prose and in verse by Oscar Wilde and in pictures by Beardsley. This seems justly ridiculous to us at the present day, but

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fifteen years or so ago the British public was not particularly discriminating.

If one were asked what was the most distinctive character of Beardsley's work the answer would probably be the firmness of his line drawing. We can see this in nearly every one of his pictures, though it is perhaps particularly noticeable in *The Rape of the Lock* series and in the wonderful portrait of Mrs. Patrick Campbell. Next to this should be mentioned his arbitrary method of handling the human form, several examples of which I have already referred to. His style was entirely his own, and his alleged plagiarism from or imitation of this or that Continental artist need not be taken seriously. The fact remains that Beardsley was a thoroughly original artist, and the drawings he executed in so relatively short a time are a permanent tribute no less to his genius than to his industry. His popularity in cultured circles never spoilt him; and the influence he exercised on the artistic movement of his time makes it necessary to discuss his position with some fullness.

There were, nevertheless, other artists whose names must be mentioned in connection with English literature in the eighties and nineties.

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Probably the greatest of them all was James McNeill Whistler, who was just beginning to come into his own about 1880, and may be said to have reached the height of his fame in England in 1890. Like Wilde, he suffered much from misinterpretation by philistine journalists; but the publication of his book, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, in 1890, followed by an enlarged edition in 1892, turned the tables in a manner which is likely to be long remembered. For how dangerous Whistler could be on paper is fresh in the memories of many of us who are still living. As a wit and intellectual fencer, he far excelled Wilde, and as an artist his theories no less than his pictures themselves still continue to arouse that amount of bitter discussion and criticism which all original work occasions sooner or later. If he showed any fault in his theories, it was, perhaps, his inclination to err on the side of being mechanical: witness his arithmetical calculations as to how far back in the canvas the sitter should appear to be placed when viewed by the spectator at a certain distance from the picture. After all, however, this is but one fault, and it did not affect Whistler's own work. It is unfortunate, from the point of view of



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the British public, that so many of Whistler's pictures have been allowed to cross the Atlantic; but there is still a fine collection of his etchings in the British Museum. And then again we have that famous book of his, a book that has been so well dealt with by Mr. Max Beerbohm that I will quote a passage from his criticism of it—a passage which does equal justice to Mr. Beerbohm's own insight and clearness of style :

His style never falters. The silhouette of no sentence is ever blurred. Every sentence is ringing with a clear vocal cadence. There, after all, in that vocal quality, is the chief test of good writing. Writing as a means of expression has to compete with talking. The talker need not rely wholly on what he says. He has the help of his mobile face and hands, and of his voice, with its various inflexions and its variable pace, whereby he may insinuate fine shades of meaning, qualifying or strengthening at will, and clothing naked words with colour, and making dead words live. But the writer? He can express a certain amount through his handwriting, if he write in a properly elastic way. But his writing is not printed in facsimile. It is printed in cold, mechanical, monotonous type. For his every effect he must rely wholly on the words that he chooses, and on the order in which he ranges them, and on his choice among the few hard-and-fast symbols of punctuation. He must so use their slender means that they shall express all that he himself can express through his voice and face and hands, or all that he would thus express if he were a good talker. Usually, the good talker is a dead failure when he tries to express himself in

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writing. For that matter, so is the bad talker. But the bad talker has the better chance of success, inasmuch as the inexpressiveness of his voice and face and hands will have sharpened his scent for words and phrases that shall in themselves convey such meanings as he has to express. Whistler was that rare phenomenon, the good talker who could write as well as he talked. Read any page of *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, and you will hear a voice in it, and see a face in it, and see gestures in it. And none of these is quite like any other known to you. It matters not that you never knew Whistler, never even set eyes on him. You see him and know him here. The voice drawls slowly, quickening to a kind of snap at the end of every sentence, and sometimes rising to a sudden screech of laughter; and, all the while, the fine fierce eyes of the talker are flashing out at you, and his long nervous fingers are tracing extravagant arabesques in the air. No! you need never have seen Whistler to know what he was like. He projected through printed words the clean-cut image and clearing echo of himself. He was a born writer, achieving perfection through pains which must have been infinite for that we see at first sight no trace of them at all.

There were also, of course, Continental influences of various kinds and tendencies. There was Wagner, whose own efforts helped to swell the flood of romanticism to an enormous extent—for Nietzsche's essay on him, although translated into French in the late eighties, was not published in English until some years afterwards, and then was misunderstood. There was

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Ibsen, too—the perverse and astringent misery from Scandinavia, as Lionel Johnson put it. There were the French impressionists, Manet, Monet, Renoir, Bastien-Lepage, and so forth. And there was also the influence of Japanese art, which Whistler was really the first to study with any degree of thoroughness and insight, but which also attracted the attention of Wilde and was satirised accordingly in one of Gilbert's plays. We cannot of course overlook the originator of the symbolistic movement in France, Mallarmé, one of the first to hold that poetry should avoid detail and should create merely by suggestion.

Another French poet whose work influenced writers of this period to some extent was Baudelaire; but a still more profound influence was Verlaine, who was so enthusiastically studied by Mr. Arthur Symons. One has only to read over such a piece as "Mon Dieu m'a dit" to realise how Verlaine would appeal to the English romanticists. And, of course, there were Guy de Maupassant, Flaubert, and Zola. Russia made the influence of her melancholy realism felt through Tourgenieff and Dostoieffski, and Shaw, too, was the means of introducing many new Continental ideas into England.

## CHAPTER VI

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CAN we realise at the present day the intellectual state of England from the sixties and seventies? Or rather can we say that there was an intellectual England at all about that period? There was, it is true, a scientific England, represented chiefly by Herbert Spencer, Darwin, and Huxley; but the science of these men, whatever may be claimed for it by their admirers, and however much it may have added to our purely material knowledge, had nothing creative about it, nothing of the artist, nothing of the poet, nothing of the philosopher. Huxley was, perhaps, the most cultured man of the three; but even he fell short of an artistic ideal. As for Darwin, we can only say of him as Nietzsche said, "Er hat den Geist vergessen, wie alle Engländer": like all Englishmen he forgot the mind. As for Spencer, I know of no better criticism on him than that written by the Italian Papini, who speaks of Spencer's

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philosophy as the patient and untiring labour of an out-of-work engineer.

The whole period was inimical to art of every description. Scientific atheism had driven away every trace of poetic imagination, and the artist had no chance in the midst of men who called for facts. It always happened, of course, that when the facts they called for were not to their liking they idealised them, as all romanticists do. It is only within quite recent years that men like Belloc and Chesterton have begun to remind us that man cannot live by facts alone, and that a nation which subsists purely on science and materialism is in a fair way to degeneration.

It was impossible, however, to convey this view to the England of the eighteen-seventies. The delightful irony of Matthew Arnold and the epigrammatic taunts of Oscar Wilde were equally ineffective. In addition, of course, the development of art was hindered, and in fact stopped altogether, by the absence of any kind of aristocratic support. The Liberal, or rather the profoundly Christian doctrine of equal rights for all, naturally tended to degrade the artist to the level of the mob. Where a few people of superior culture did manage to keep themselves

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above the level of the middle classes, this nation of business men treated them all alike with good-humoured contempt. It never occurred to them that there might be different types of artists or philosophers, that some, the real artists, might be induced to create through a superabundance of intellectual vigour, and that others might be induced to create owing to a precisely opposite cause—intellectual weakness, instability, romanticism. Distinctions like these, which it is absolutely necessary to make when treating of any artistic period, were much too subtle for the comprehension of the stolid British bourgeoisie.

I have referred to the malign influence exercised on the artistic imagination by the scientific atheism of the time ; but it must not be supposed from this that religion as such had been driven away altogether. There was religion of a kind, namely, the religion professed by those who called themselves Non-conformists or Dissenters or Low-Church people. Speaking of them generally, we might perhaps call them Puritans, and the Puritan type of mind was common to many people who did not profess any of the Puritan religions. It is quite obvious, for example, that Darwin and Spencer,

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whatever their views on a higher power might have been, were actuated in all their conduct by Puritan notions of morality, and the cardinal defect of these people was clearly pointed out by Matthew Arnold. "They have developed one side of their humanity at the expense of all others, and have become incomplete and mutilated men in consequence. . . . The influence of the English race towards moral development and self-conquest has nowhere so powerfully manifested itself as in Puritanism. Nowhere has Puritanism found so adequate an expression as in the religious organisation of the Independents. The modern Independents have a newspaper, *The Non-conformist*, written with great sincerity and ability. The motto, the standard, the profession of faith which this organ of theirs carries aloft is 'The dissidence of Dissent and the Protestantism of the Protestant religion.' There is sweetness and light, and an ideal of complete harmonious human perfection!"

The religious life of England, indeed, during the latter half of the nineteenth century was quite as sombre as at any other time in the history of the country, and when we come to realise what it actually was like we shall find

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that we have no cause to rail against the conventions of the early Victorian era.

Apart altogether from the question of art we find that Liberalism, using the word in its nominal political sense, was beginning to have evil effects on the existence of the lower strata of the population. Liberalism, being merely capitalism in politics, was gradually tending to crush the workman for the benefit of the employer, and the inception of the trade union movement had been followed in many industrial districts by murderous riots and strikes. Too comfortable to realise the seriousness of their position, capitalists and manufacturers were sitting on the edge of a human volcano, utterly indifferent to the violent dissatisfaction which was beginning to seethe among the workmen whom they were so cruelly exploiting. True, a certain number of the doctrines of Karl Marx were already beginning to spread in the Midlands and the North ; but the Socialist of these days was regarded as a mad visionary, a harmless crank. He was not a practical person and he was, as a rule, not respectable, and two more severe accusations could not be made against any man by the bourgeois mind of the period. The epithets were in most cases



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well deserved ; but the Socialist, however mad, however cranky, and however harmless, possessed at all events one great gift which was not common either to the middle or to the upper classes, viz., the gift of imagination.

Into this deadly dull, stupid, philistine, materialistic society, George Bernard Shaw burst in the late seventies. He had been born in Ireland, but he was not a Celt. He has himself referred to his nationality by saying, "I am a typical Irishman, my family came from Yorkshire." Mr. Shaw's people, in other words, had nothing in common with the imaginative and poetic Irish of the West, South, and East ; but were rather connected with the materialistic and manufacturing type of Irishman to be found chiefly in Ulster. The Celt has all the sympathetic feelings for humanity which we usually find developed by the Roman Catholic Church, although he may not possess them in so great a degree as his French, Spanish, or Italian brethren in the faith. They are too, for the most part, agriculturists, and this blending of humanity with primitive nature produces a type of man which is in many respects admirable. The opposite type, however, to which Mr. Shaw belongs, as the develop-

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ment of his mind obviously shows, was by no means so admirable. This latter type is not concerned with nature but with industrialism, and where religion is concerned he is Nonconformist and Low-Church to a degree that the average Englishman will not readily be able to conceive. He is perfectly rabid in his bigotry, and all the qualities represented by the Catholic Church are anathema to him.

Mr. Shaw himself did not share the views common to his own class, and indeed he has often uttered a violent protest against many of them ; but in endeavouring to avoid the errors of a deadening religion he fell into the errors, which he vainly tried to avoid, of an equally deadening science. Even when he came to London in his early twenties he was a man of wide reading, and everything that he had seen, heard, or read tended to make him a revolutionary and reformer. The first question, however, which the Continental philosopher will ask in connection with any reformer is, Is he a reformer from strength or from weakness ? In other words, Has he such a superabundance of intellectual vitality, such a long line of artistic ancestors, such a clear insight into the problems that confront us, that he can lay down any

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general principles, the application of which will lead to the solution? Or is he, on the other hand, a reformer merely because of intellectual weakness, because he has not attained to spiritual harmony; and does he take up reforming simply to ease his conscience, in exactly the same way as society ladies go in for "slumming" to ease their consciences, or as the modern Liberal capitalists cause measures like National Insurance and Old Age Pensions to be passed for the same reason? It is to be feared that there is only one answer in Mr. Shaw's case. Whatever induced him to take up reforming, it was certainly not intellectual strength. We can judge his nature with tolerable accuracy from many of the characters which appear in his own works—as he himself says in his preface to *Man and Superman*, the author must be judged by those characters into which he puts what he knows of himself, his Hamlets and Macbeths and Lears and Prosperos. And in the same preface Mr. Shaw has unwittingly given us yet another key to his whole character, when he says, "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown

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on the scrap-heap ; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy." This indeed is the true fundamental Shaw : all his life he has lacked happiness ; that is to say, he lacked artistic harmony and unity, and however much his works may interest or amuse us, we, as artists, are faced with the fact that there is an inartistic bitterness and restlessness in almost every one of Shaw's characters, in almost every page he wrote.

I have referred earlier in this book to the necessity for a sound philosophical foundation, a foundation which is necessary to the artist before he can create, just as it is necessary to a reformer before he can reform. It is unfortunate that Mr. Shaw has never stood upon such a foundation as this, and all his attempts at reforming have been in reality attempts to find such a foundation. He has admitted that he owes a great deal to Samuel Butler, and he has also acknowledged his obligations to Schopenhauer. And on page 12 of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, we find a remarkable footnote which ends thus :

Schopenhauer's philosophy, like that of all pessimists, is really based on the old view of the will as

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original sin, and on the 1750-1850 view that the intellect is the Divine grace that is to save us from it. It is as well to warn those who fancy that Schopenhauerism is one and indivisible, that acceptance of its metaphysics by no means involves endorsement of its philosophy.

This was written in 1891, and I should be inclined to explain Mr. Shaw's hedging in regard to Schopenhauer's philosophy by the fact that Nietzsche was just then beginning to be known in England.

If Mr. Shaw had no philosophical foundation, however, his wide reading, and particularly his reading in modern German literature, had given him what might have been regarded from the artistic standpoint as at least one advantage over his competitors in journalism and literature—he had a great many new ideas on music, philosophy, art, and the stage, and he had in addition what we may call, for want of a better term, an open mind. He was bound down to no particular tradition in art or science, and, in contradistinction to nearly every other English author and journalist, he had a warm welcome for every new point of view, every new idea he came across, and the more revolutionary the point of view or the idea the more gladly he welcomed it. It

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is true that many of the ideas which Mr. Shaw took up were perfectly worthless, and that there were many among them which he misunderstood; but, to quote the old proverb, "in the land of the blind the one-eyed man is king," and Shaw, who enjoyed playing with new ideas of all sorts—good, bad, and indifferent—was to that extent superior to his confrères, who could not stand new ideas at any price and treated them with all the contempt the business man bestowed upon the artist. From about 1880 onwards, therefore, when nearly every other writer in England was content to remain in the old rut, Shaw was pouring forth new ideas about economics, marriage, the status of women, sex, divorce, eugenics, the endowment of motherhood, and numerous other things. At a time when psychological knowledge was not applied in England, and when indeed psychology itself was not appreciated at its proper value, no one could discern the intense bitterness underlying Shaw's wit. His style was obviously forcible and pointed to an extraordinary degree; but no one observed that it was the style of a man whom bitterness, disappointment, and contempt for his fellow-creatures had almost

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thrown into a fit of intellectual hysteria. No wonder he refers to himself as a "feverish little clod of ailments and grievances."

Mr. Shaw's ideas, however—although most of them were compounded from a jumble of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Samuel Butler—soon attracted the attention of those who professed to be intellectuals. It is no wonder, then, that in 1884 we find him playing a prominent part in the development of the Fabian Society, and eagerly contributing to the series of tracts issued from that time forward by this well-known organisation.

In spite of all Mr. Shaw's essays on music and the drama, however, the bent of his mind was never imaginative but always scientific. This can clearly be seen in the tracts which he wrote for the Fabian Society and in the papers which he contributed to the series of Fabian Essays which he edited in 1889. These essays dealt with the basis of Socialism—itsself a scientific and not an imaginative subject—and Mr. Shaw chose to deal with the out-and-out economic side of Socialism. One of his essays treats of rent, the cost of production, wages, and the sale of labour, while the other, though nominally of an historical nature, will be found

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on examination to be more concerned with economics than with history.

Of the novels which Mr. Shaw published between 1879 and 1883, *Cashel Byron's Profession* is probably the best, and in it of course the struggling, pugnacious, restless, bitter, and withal cool and logical Cashel Byron is Mr. Shaw himself. I do not know whether Mr. Shaw meant to depict himself in this way, but the fact remains that he has done so. No other boxer, and indeed no other man, ever thought or talked as Cashel did, with the exception of Mr. Shaw himself and those of his disciples who try to imitate him. Take the scene, for example, when Cashel Byron calls on his sweetheart, Lydia, and unexpectedly meets his long-lost mother :

As Lydia offered him her hand, her companion, who had surveyed the visitor first with indifference and then with incredulous surprise, exclaimed, in a burst of delighted recognition, like a child finding a long lost plaything, "My darling boy!" And going to Cashel with the grace of a swan, she clasped him in her arms. In acknowledgment of which, he thrust his red discomfited face over her shoulder ; winked at Lydia with his tongue in his cheek, and said :

"This is what you may call the Voice of Nature, and no mistake."

"What a splendid creature you are!" said Mrs. Byron, holding him a little away from her, the better



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to admire him. "How handsome you are, you wretch!"

"How d'ye do, Miss Carew," said Cashel, breaking loose, and turning to Lydia. "Never mind her: it's only my mother. At least," he added, as if correcting himself, "shes my mamma."

"And where have you come from? Where have you been? Do you know that I have not seen you for seven years, you unnatural boy? Think of his being my son, Miss Carew! Give me another kiss, my own," she continued, grasping his arm affectionately. "What a muscular creature you are!"

"Kiss away as much as you like," said Cashel, struggling with the old schoolboy sullenness as it returned oppressively upon him. "I suppose youre well. You look right enough."

"Yes," she said mockingly, beginning to despise him for his inability to act up to her in this thrilling scene: "I am right enough. Your language is as refined as ever. And why do you get your hair cropped close like that? You must let it grow, and——"

"Now look here," said Cashel, stopping her hand neatly as she raised it to re-arrange his locks. "You just drop it, or I'll walk out at that door, and you wont see me again for another seven years. You can either take me as you find me, or let me alone. If you want to know the reason for my wearing my hair short, you'll find it in the histories of Absalom and Don Mendoza. Now are you any the wiser?"

Mrs. Byron became a shade colder. "Indeed!" she said. "Just the same still, Cashel?"

"Just the same, both one and other of us," he replied. "Before you spoke six words, I felt as if we'd parted only yesterday."

"I am rather taken aback by the success of my experiment," interposed Lydia. "I invited you pur-

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posely to meet one another. The resemblance between you led me to suspect the truth; and my suspicion was confirmed by the account Mr. Byron gave me of his adventures."

Mrs. Byron's vanity was touched. "Is he like me?" she said, scanning his features. He, without heeding her, said to Lydia with undisguised mortification:

"And was that why you sent for me?"

"Are you disappointed?" said Lydia.

"He is not in the least glad to see me," said Mrs. Byron plaintively. "He has no heart."

"Now she'll go on for the next hour," said Cashel, looking to Lydia, obviously because he found it much pleasanter than looking at his mother. "No matter: if you dont care, I dont. So fire away, mamma."

Cashel Byron answering his mother is Mr. Shaw answering a heckler after delivering a lecture.

Even in this, one of his earliest books, however, Mr. Shaw showed a side of his character to which Mr. Chesterton was, I think, the first to draw attention publicly, viz., the extreme Puritanism of this ardent social revolutionary. Cashel Byron has been a prize-fighter from his teens and is idealised by all the women who meet him. We are nevertheless distinctly given to understand that he has never had any sexual intercourse until his marriage at the age of twenty-five or so. The truth is, as Dr. Levy

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pointed out in Volume VII of *The New Age*, Mr. Shaw is not exactly an ordinary flesh-and-blood man. His intellectual descent may be traced back to Kant, via Ibsen, Schopenhauer, and Hegel; and Kant, above all, was a truly Christian philosopher in his contempt for the body. In spite of some of Mr. Shaw's diatribes against the reason, this is a contempt which he seems fully to share. Its effect may be noted above all when we consider the heroines in Mr. Shaw's dramas, or indeed when we consider even the heroes in them. They are not ordinary flesh-and-blood men and women; but disputants, arguers, dialecticians. Sometimes their conversation is witty, as in parts of *Man and Superman* or *Getting Married*; at other times, as in *Cæsar and Cleopatra* or *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet*, it is tiresome and dull, and in such a case the reader is bored to extinction; for there is as a rule nothing in the argument that should be expounded in a conversational form—we are often reminded of the very worst things in Plato, or even Fénelon's *Dialogues of the Dead*. Mr. Shaw's Cæsar is not, of course, a calm statesman and soldier, but simply a rather superior and somewhat disputatious member of the Fabian Society, and his Cleopatra is merely

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Lydia Carew or Ann Whitefield in another guise.

In the late eighties Mr. Shaw appears to have confined himself principally to writing Fabian tracts. In 1891, however, appeared his first important book—his most important production, indeed, with the exception of *Man and Superman*. I refer, of course, to *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, concerning which it has been rather obviously remarked that it is merely the quintessence of Shaw. Nominally an exposition of Ibsen's ideas, it contains many acute remarks on all sorts of subjects, from the establishment of a national theatre to the status of women and annual parliaments. It is a very compact and well-written volume with some provocative remark in nearly every paragraph. Conceive, if you can, what the British public of 1891 was likely to think of the following :

The domestic career is no more natural to all women than the military career is natural to all men ; although it may be necessary that every able-bodied woman should be called on to risk her life in childbed just as it may be necessary that every man should be called on to risk his life in the battlefield. It is of course quite true that the majority of women are kind to children, and prefer their own to other people's. But exactly the same thing is true of the majority of men, who nevertheless do not consider that their

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proper sphere is the nursery. The case may be illustrated more grotesquely by the fact that the majority of women who have dogs are kind to them, and prefer their own dogs to other people's; yet it is not proposed that women should restrict their activities to the rearing of puppies. If we have come to think that the nursery and the kitchen are the natural sphere of a woman, we have done so exactly as English children come to think that a cage is the natural sphere of a parrot—because they have never seen one anywhere else. No doubt there are philistine parrots who agree with their owners that it is better to be in a cage than out, so long as there is plenty of hempseed and Indian corn there. There may even be idealist parrots who persuade themselves that the mission of a parrot is to minister to the happiness of a private family by whistling and saying "Pretty Polly," and that it is in the sacrifice of its liberty to this altruistic pursuit that a true parrot finds the supreme satisfaction of its soul. I will not go so far as to affirm that there are theological parrots who are convinced that imprisonment is the will of God because it is unpleasant; but I am confident that there are rationalist parrots who can demonstrate that it would be a cruel kindness to let a parrot out to fall a prey to cats, or at least to forget its accomplishments and coarsen its naturally delicate fibres in an unprotected struggle for existence. Still, the only parrot a free-souled person can sympathise with is the one that insists on being let out as the first condition of its making itself agreeable. A selfish bird, you may say: one that puts its own gratification before that of the family which is so fond of it—before even the greatest happiness of the greatest number: one that, in aping the independent spirit of a man, has unparroted itself and become a creature that has neither the home-loving nature of a bird

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nor the strength and enterprise of a mastiff. All the same, you respect that parrot in spite of your conclusive reasoning ; and if it persists, you will have either to let it out or kill it.

Largely through the influence of Mr. Shaw himself, ideas like these have now become commonplace. Whether we like them or disapprove of them entirely, the fact remains that we have at all events got used to them. We can conceive the reception they met with in the nineties when we read Mr. Shaw's book and find out what some of the dramatic critics of the time said about Ibsen. In dealing with *Ghosts*, for example, the *Daily Telegraph* referred to it as "an open drain ; a loathsome sore unbandaged ; a dirty act done publicly ; a lazar house with all its doors and windows open." The *Daily News* called it "a most dismal and repulsive production," while *Truth* could only say that it was "garbage and offal," and *The Era* criticised it as being "as foul and filthy a concoction as has ever been allowed to disgrace the boards of an English theatre." As for Ibsen himself, the *Gentlewoman* typified the English Press by calling him "a gloomy sort of ghoul, bent on groping for horrors by night, and blinking like a stupid old owl when

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the warm sunlight of the best of life dances into his wrinkled eyes." The *Evening Standard*, again, referred to Ibsen's admirers as "lovers of prurience and dabblers in impropriety, who are eager to gratify their illicit tastes under the pretence of art."

As we are not here concerned with Ibsen, I should not think it worth while quoting these out-of-date criticisms were it not for the fact that they may convey to the present-day reader some notion of what has been said for the last twenty years about Mr. Shaw himself, his plays, and his followers. Such utterly disproportionate criticism, of course, does more harm to its authors than to what they attack. Ibsen's plays would have been sufficiently condemned if the critics had contented themselves with saying that they were ugly and consequently inartistic, and that again they endeavoured to propagate ideas which were not suitable for representation in a théâtre. I myself, for example, would never condemn Mr. Shaw's plays as plays by saying that they would undermine the foundations of morality and lead to anarchy, etc. It is sufficient to condemn them as plays by saying that they are dull and ugly, and they are dull and ugly

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in the first place because they endeavour to propagate an idea, or to show up some social injustice, which would be better propagated or shown up in the form of a Fabian tract or an essay. For drama, as the very etymology of the word implies, is the representation of some phase of life by means of action, and Mr. Shaw's argumentative style of play, in the second place, tends to do away with action altogether. There is practically no action, for example, in *Getting Married*, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, or *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet*, and there is very little indeed in *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. In short, that which makes Mr. Shaw a scientist rather than an artist, and a Puritan rather than a lover of life, likewise affects his dramatic construction, viz., the economic bent of his mind. Mrs. Warren becomes a prostitute through economic pressure, and a passable system of economics could be built up out of some of the suggestions laid down in the conversations in *Getting Married*.

In the eighteen-nineties, as at the present day and as probably will always be the case, Englishmen will be tolerant of discussion on almost any subject except anything which may tend to break up their home life or inter-



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fere with the chastity of their female relatives. There is a distinction between discussion on this topic and a discussion on sexual relations in general. In Mr. Wells's novels, for example, such as the scenes between Remington and Isabel in *The New Machiavelli*, the average middle-class Englishman will see merely a common enough fictitious incident which may happen to any lover, and accordingly he does not object to Mr. Wells's novels, even though certain library censorship committees may think that he does. But he becomes seriously perturbed when he finds Mr. Shaw suggesting that an interest in children is not necessarily natural to a woman. Another quotation which I venture to take from *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* will, I think, be sufficient to show the sort of thing that seriously annoys John Bull :

The statement that Ibsen's plays have an immoral tendency is, in the sense in which it is used, quite true. Immorality does not necessarily imply mischievous conduct: it implies conduct, mischievous or not, which does not conform to current ideals. Since Ibsen has devoted himself almost entirely to showing that the spirit or will of Man is constantly outgrowing his ideals, and that therefore conformity to them is constantly producing results no less tragic than those which follow the violation of ideals which are still valid, the main effect of his plays is to keep

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before the public the importance of being always prepared to act immorally, to remind men that they ought to be as careful how they yield to a temptation to tell the truth as to a temptation to hold their tongues, and to urge upon women that the desirability of their preserving their chastity depends just as much on circumstances as the desirability of taking a cab instead of walking. . . . There can be no question as to the effect likely to be produced on an individual by his conversion from the ordinary acceptance of current ideals as safe standards of conduct, to the vigilant open-mindedness of Ibsen. It must at once greatly deepen the sense of moral responsibility. Before conversion the individual anticipates nothing worse in the way of examination at the judgment bar of his conscience than such questions as, Have you kept the Commandments? Have you obeyed the law? Have you attended church regularly; paid your rates and taxes to Cæsar; and contributed, in reason, to charitable institutions? It may be hard to do all these things; but it is still harder not to do them, as our ninety-nine moral cowards in the hundred well know. And even a scoundrel can do them all and yet live a worse life than the smuggler or prostitute who must answer No all through the catechism. Substitute for such a technical examination one in which the whole point to be settled is, Guilty or Not Guilty?—one in which there is no more and no less respect for chastity than for incontinence, for subordination than for rebellion, for legality than for illegality, for piety than for blasphemy, in short, for the standard virtues than for the standard vices, and immediately, instead of lowering the moral standard by relaxing the tests of worth, you raise it by increasing their stringency to a point at which no mere Pharisaism or moral cowardice can pass them. Naturally this does

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not please the Pharisee. The respectable lady of the strictest Christian principles, who has brought up her children with such relentless regard to their ideal morality that if they have any spirit left in them by the time they arrive at years of independence they use their liberty to rush deliriously to the devil—this unimpeachable woman has always felt it unjust that the respect she wins should be accompanied by deep-seated detestation, whilst the latest spiritual heiress of Nell Gwynne, whom no respectable person dare bow to in the street, is a popular idol. The reason is—though the virtuous lady does not know it—that Nell Gwynne is a better woman than she; and the abolition of the idealist test which brings her out a worse one, and its replacement by the realist test which would show the true relation between them, would be a most desirable step forward in public morals, especially as it would act impartially, and set the good side of the Pharisee above the bad side of the Bohemian as ruthlessly as it would set the good side of the Bohemian above the bad side of the Pharisee.

I pass over *The Perfect Wagnerite*, the *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, and the *Plays for Puritans*, since it is sufficient for the purpose of Mr. Shaw's psychology to examine *Man and Superman*, *Getting Married*, and *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet*. If by a play we mean, with Aristotle, something that must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, we must, it is to be feared, come to the conclusion that these productions of Mr. Shaw's are not plays at all in the strictly dramatic sense of the word. They are a series

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of conversations." In the latter two no particular problem is solved; but any number of problems are discussed. In *Man and Superman* we get nothing but Mr. Shaw's conception of something which he calls the "Life Force." It was merely the word "Superman," of course, which connected Shaw with Nietzsche, for otherwise there is nothing in common to them. A German critic indeed, Julius Bab, has pointed out that Shaw is simply the Anglo-Saxon counterpart of the Russian Tolstoy. "Are they not both enemies of Shakespeare?" asks Mr. Bab. "Is it not clear that there is no real difference between the two, and that only the greater facility of the Celt, and his stronger, freer Western intelligence separate the London playwright from the Slavonic preacher of repentance?" There is much more profundity in a criticism like this than in the loose assertions which have often been made that Shaw merely took Nietzsche's philosophy and adapted it for the British public. In the article in Volume VII of *The New Age* to which I have already referred, Dr. Oscar Levy points out that on the contrary it is precisely against persons of the type of Mr. Shaw that Nietzsche wrote his books. Shaw glories in being a

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heretic, a revolutionary, a destroyer. Nietzsche, who had all the artist's reverence for culture and tradition, was of a diametrically opposite temperament. Shaw declaimed against the current morality of his time, but all the principles expressed in his public works nevertheless show that his tendency is to re-establish in another form the very morality against which he declaims. Our marriage and divorce laws may be bad, and our distribution of wealth may be absurd, but we have yet to learn that we should be better off if our present arrangements were superseded by the Fabian State. We cannot, of course, hold Mr. Shaw responsible for all the Fabian tracts that have been issued ; but we know that he wrote a great many of the earlier ones, and there are at least two to which he has put his name, *The Impossibility of Anarchism* and *Socialism for Millionaires*. It is perhaps in the latter that Mr. Shaw exhibits the most inartistic and unphilosophical phase of his mind. Leaving art altogether out of the question, he concentrates his attention on economics pure and simple, or rather when he deals with any philosophic or artistic matter the reference is purely incidental and the higher subject of art is considered from the lower

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point of view of economics. It may perhaps have occurred to him that we could get rid of much of our industrial poverty, and make our population more agricultural and therefore healthier, by cutting down the luxuries and needs which have risen solely through the spread of industries since the beginning of our middle-class industrial rule early last century; but whether this view occurred to Mr. Shaw or not we do not find it in his pamphlets or his works. He tells us somewhere that poverty is the worst of crimes, and he concluded his *Socialism for Millionaires* by deliberately laying down the principle that the man who makes the luxury of yesterday the need of to-morrow is as great a benefactor as the man who makes two ears of wheat grow where one grew before.

Mr. Shaw, however, cannot altogether be exonerated from responsibility where the Fabian Society is concerned. He has been an enthusiastic member of the body for more than a quarter of a century, and he was for many years an active member of the executive. He must therefore be held at least jointly responsible for the pamphlets issued in the name of the Society. These include several by Mr. Sidney Webb, whose proposals for dealing with our

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sociological problems are perhaps the most ghastly ever put before the public. Mr. John Burns summed them up admirably when he said that they would turn England from a free country into a servile State—a phrase which, thanks to its use by various writers of *The New Age* and by Mr. Belloc in *The Eye Witness*, promises to become classic. Mr. Webb, too, was one of the first members of the Fabian Society and was for a long time associated with Mr. Shaw on the executive.

Although Mr. Shaw's relations with the Fabian Society must be borne in mind when we consider his sociological proposals, they are not strictly necessary, perhaps, for a thorough consideration of his own views. It is true that he cannot be said to have definitely put forward any really constructive proposals; but from some of the clever epigrams scattered through his plays, and also from *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, which forms the appendix to *Man and Superman*, we can easily judge what his constructive proposals would be like if he ever brought forward any. He would appear to have some liking for the community established at Oneida Creek by certain Perfectionist-Communists, whose object was, as they said, to

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devote themselves exclusively to the establishment of the Kingdom of God. He recognises the truth that democracy "cannot rise above the level of the human material of which its votaries are made," and he wishes instead for a democracy of supermen. But Shaw's superman is not the glowing creation of an artist-philosopher, as Nietzsche's superman is. Shaw's superman is some one who has developed a large proportion of Life Force, and it is a little difficult at first to discover exactly what this Life Force consists of. Mr. Chesterton is quite right when he intimates that we cannot stop worshipping God to worship a Life Force instead, as if, to use his expression, any one could worship a hyphen. Shaw, as a matter of fact, writes his phrase without a hyphen, but Mr. Chesterton's objection is none the less apposite. This Life Force turns out in the end to be merely brains. In Act III of *Man and Superman*, when Ana, the Devil, the Statue, and Don Juan are discussing various problems, Ana inquires whether there is nothing in heaven but contemplation. Don Juan answers her and the scene proceeds :

DON JUAN: In the heaven I seek, no other joy.  
But there is the work of helping Life in its struggle



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upward. Think of how it wastes and scatters itself, how it raises up obstacles to itself and destroys itself in its ignorance and blindness. It needs a brain, this irresistible force, lest in its ignorance it should resist itself. What a piece of work is man! says the poet. Yes; but what a blunderer! Here is the highest miracle of organisation yet attained by life, the most intensely alive thing that exists, the most conscious of all the organisms; and yet, how wretched are his brains! Stupidity made sordid and cruel by the realities learnt from toil and poverty: Imagination resolved to starve sooner than face these realities, piling up illusions to hide them, and calling itself cleverness, genius! And each accusing the other of its own defect: Stupidity accusing Imagination of folly, and Imagination accusing Stupidity of ignorance: whereas, alas! Stupidity has all the knowledge, and Imagination all the intelligence.

THE DEVIL: And a pretty kettle of fish they make of it between them. Did I not say, when I was arranging that affair of Faust's, that all Man's reason has done for him is to make him beastlier than any beast? One splendid body is worth the brains of a hundred dyspeptic, flatulent philosophers.

DON JUAN: You forget that brainless magnificence of body has been tried. Things immeasurably greater than man in every respect but brain have existed and perished. The megatherium, the ichthyosaurus have paced the earth with seven-league steps and hidden the day with cloud-vast wings. Where are they now? Fossils in museums, and so few and imperfect at that, that a knuckle bone or a tooth of one of them is prized beyond the lives of a thousand soldiers. These things lived and wanted to live; but for lack of brains they did not know how to carry out their purpose, and so destroyed themselves.

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At this point the Devil breaks in with a wild tirade against the bad use which man is making of his brain at the present time. He objects to modern inventions, especially those connected with war, and holds that in the arts of peace man is a bungler. In the midst of the outburst, however, Bernard Shaw apparently makes use of the Devil to inform us that man's morality is simply gentility, an excuse for consuming without producing—thereby showing that the Devil can quote economics for his purpose.

Shaw's enthusiasm for brains, I think, is due to the fact that as a Puritan he did not care to trust to his imagination alone, and in addition, being a man of discordant instincts, he could make no allowance for the will. The finer parts of the mind being thus thrown aside, nothing remained but brains; hence brains were glorified. The clever anonymous writer of the series of Unedited Opinions in *The New Age* suggested (in Volume IX, No. 4) that Shaw found himself in possession of more brains than most people and shrewdly announced that there was nothing like leather. As the same writer pointed out, however, there is such a thing as nous, which is even more important

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than brains. But brains to Mr. Shaw mean rather what most people would call the reason, or rather the reasoning powers, dialectical ability—not necessarily originality, and far less imagination. His plays are not merely conversations, they are arid intellectual discussions. With however different types of mind he may try to endow his characters, they all have this in common, that they reason over the problem at issue in precisely the same dialectical manner. The men and women in the plays are not of course ordinary men and women, and they are not even men and women such as we might expect to meet at the Fabian Society ; they are simply the intellectual children of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who puts his own opinions into the mouths of some, and the conventional dialectic objections into the mouths of others. He utilises his characters to set off some sociological problem in exactly the same way as Mr. Wells uses his characters to set off some possible or probable scientific discovery. We cannot accurately speak of a plot in connection with Mr. Shaw's plays, for there is none in the ordinary sense of the word ; but we may say that the economic or political question is the main thing and that the characters are quite sub-

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sidiary. Only a trifling difference separates Violet and Ann in *Man and Superman* from Edith and Lesbia in *Getting Married*. In fact, it would not matter if all the characters in *Man and Superman* made their appearance in *Getting Married*, and joined in the discussion of the questions at issue with the characters around whom *Getting Married* was written. I have tried this experiment myself, and its complete success shows what little attention Mr. Shaw pays to the technique of dramatic construction.

I have said that *Man and Superman* is chiefly important as developing the philosophy of the Life Force; but this glorification of the stock-exchange type of mind is not the only gem in the play. There are several outbursts by the hero, John Tanner, and John Tanner appears to me to resemble Mr. Shaw as Mr. Shaw must have talked at the age of thirty or so, and as indeed he talks and writes even now. Tanner holds views on women, love, and marriage like those to be met with in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*. Incidentally he illustrates Mr. Shaw's Puritanism, for John Tanner's remarks on the development of the moral sense are applicable to Mr. Shaw himself. In Act I, for

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example, he addresses Ann on the subject, and the conversation goes on as follows :

TANNER: What does the beginning of manhood and womanhood mean in most people's mouths? You know: it means the beginning of love. But love began long before that for me. Love played its part in the earliest dreams and follies and romances I can remember—may I say the earliest follies and romances we can remember?—though we did not understand it at the time. No: the change that came to me was the birth in me of moral passion: and I declare that according to my experience moral passion is the only real passion.

ANN: All passions ought to be moral, Jack.

TANNER: Ought! Do you think that anything is strong enough to impose oughts on a passion except a stronger passion still?

ANN: Our moral sense controls passion, Jack. Don't be stupid.

TANNER: Our moral sense! And is that not a passion? Is the devil to have all the passions as well as all the good tunes? If it were not a passion—if it were not the mightiest of the passions, all the other passions would sweep it away like a leaf before a hurricane. It is the birth of that passion that turns a child into a man.

ANN: There are other passions, Jack. Very strong ones.

TANNER: All the other passions were in me before; but they were idle and aimless—mere childish greedinesses and cruelties, curiosities and fancies, habits and superstitions, grotesque and ridiculous to the mature intelligence. When they suddenly began to shine like newly-lit flames it was by no light of their own, but by the radiance of the dawning moral passion.

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That passion dignified them, gave them conscience and meaning, found them a mob of appetites and organized them into an army of purposes and principles. My soul was born of that passion.

This, of course, is pure Lutheranism—discarding the flesh for the ecstasies of the saint ; throwing over the healthy humanity such as we find in the Roman Church for a dry, hard, northern Calvinism. This sort of conversation continues for some time, and then we have Ann and Tanner brought together again. Ann has been compelled to tell a lie about Tanner because, as she explains to him somewhat artlessly, “Mother made me,” whereupon we have a few remarks from Tanner about marriage and the family :

TANNER: Is that any reason why you are not to call your soul your own? Oh, I protest against this vile abjection of youth to age! Look at fashionable society as you know it. What does it pretend to be? An exquisite dance of nymphs. What is it? A horrible procession of wretched girls, each in the claws of a cynical, cunning, avaricious, disillusioned, ignorantly experienced, foul-minded old woman whom she calls mother, and whose duty it is to corrupt her mind and sell her to the highest bidder. Why do these unhappy slaves marry anybody, however old and vile, sooner than not marry at all? Because marriage is their only means of escape from these decrepit friends who hide their selfish ambitions, their

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jealous hatred of the young rivals who have supplanted them, under the mask of maternal duty and family affection. Such things are abominable: the voice of nature proclaims for the daughter a father's care, and for the son a mother's. The law for father and son and mother and daughter is not the law of love: it is the law of revolution, of emancipation, of final supersession of the old and worn-out by the young and capable. I tell you, the first duty of manhood and womanhood is a Declaration of Independence: the man who pleads his father's authority is no man: the woman who pleads her mother's authority is unfit to bear citizens to a free people.

This rather hysterical emphasising of independence is, it is greatly to be feared, quite typical of the romanticist, and Mr. Shaw, despite his wide knowledge and open-hearted cynicism, remains a romanticist. I do not call him a romanticist merely because he has always taken the side of Wagner, who was the romanticist *par excellence* of the nineteenth century, but for many other reasons as well. It might be thought that in *The Sanity of Art*, Mr. Shaw had sufficiently demonstrated his disbelief in certain romantic forms of art and music; but it would be found that he does not really object to this. He does not like Wagner's imitators, but he likes Wagner. He pours contempt upon the followers of Monet, but regards Monet as an artist—he goes so far in-

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deed as to refer to Monet and Whistler in the same paragraph as if they were both artists of equal eminence, overlooking the fact that Whistler was an aristocratic artist to his fingertips, and that Monet was a blatant idealist who played, roughly speaking, the same rôle in painting as Hegel or Schelling in philosophy. Mr. Shaw, in other words, is so much interested in any dynamic movement in culture that he does not pause to consider whether it may lead upward or downward. It is creditable to Mr. Shaw that he recognised the importance of Nietzsche and discerned the weak points in Nordau; but it is not so creditable that he should have referred in *The Sanity of Art* to Nietzsche, Wagner, Ibsen, Strauss, and Monet as if they were all on one and the same artistic plane.

There is one remarkable feature common to Shaw and Wagner, on which I think sufficient emphasis has not yet been laid. It is a well-known sociological fact that the romanticist is distinguished among other things by lack of confidence in himself, and the romantic artist is not content merely to write a play or an opera and leave it for the world to judge; he is anxious to explain it in detail so that the



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world may know as far as possible exactly what it means. This characteristic is strongly marked in Wagner and Shaw. In this country Wagner is not very well known as an author, but his works nevertheless fill half a shelf, and most of them deal with his own musical compositions, in which he has not sufficient confidence to let the world judge them on their own merits. We find a precisely similar characteristic in connection with Mr. Shaw's plays. Every play is preceded by a long preface, the perusal of which will almost exhaust the mind of the average reader before he comes to the actual play. Not only do we have this lengthy preface, however, but also in the play itself stage directions and sociological observations which continually interrupt the slender plot or rather the series of conversations of which Mr. Shaw's plays are composed. We cannot begin *Man and Superman* until we read a page and a half of notes about Roebuck Ramsden. Then, after two lines of text, we are interrupted again while we read half a page descriptive of Octavius Robinson. Four pages of conversation follow, and we are once more interrupted while we read three-quarters of a page about John Tanner. We get along nicely for six pages, when there

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is another break—two pages introducing Miss Ann Whitefield. After this we get along better, but still the first act is not over before we have to read nearly half a page in order that we may become familiar with Violet. Before we can get on with Act II we must read about Straker, Tanner's chauffeur, and we have not proceeded very far before we have to learn something about Hector Malone, whose character is described in a couple of pages. At the beginning of Act III we have four pages describing the brigands and the scenery, and interruptions of a similar nature are continually tripping us until we reach the end of the play. And all this is characteristic not only of *Man and Superman*, but of every play that Mr. Shaw has written. He claims descent from Æschylus, overlooking the fact that every character in the whole range of Greek drama was allowed to develop naturally on the stage, and that neither Æschylus himself nor his immediate predecessors and followers could possibly have understood why it should be necessary to write a preface explaining the play, and a series of psychological notes within the text of the play, as well as the actual play itself.

Mr. Shaw has laid such stress on art that

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these criticisms are naturally directed at him from an artistic standpoint; but a book or any other work of art can only last if it is written in conformity with the æsthetic laws laid down for works of art. One French critic, M. Augustin Filon, when referring to Dickens, has summed up this matter very concisely \* by saying that these æsthetic laws are instinctive in the born writer, and that they impose themselves in cases where there are no critics to lay them down; and he summarises a commonplace of modern criticism when he adds, "These laws decide the relationship between the whole and the parts, between the thought and the expression."

In Mr. Shaw's plays, as in Mr. Wells's novels, the part becomes greater than the whole, and this of course entirely spoils the harmony of his plays from an artistic point of view. The fact that they are inartistic, however, does not necessarily imply that they are not popular, for *Man and Superman*, with a few necessary alterations for production on the stage, has had a good run, as also had the sketch *How he lied to her Husband*. This little play, by the way, has been produced at the Palace Theatre

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\* *Journal des Débats*, January 24, 1912.

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of Varieties—probably the best music-hall in London, but still a music-hall. That Mr. Shaw, the ardent reformer, revolutionary Socialist, and would-be artist, should have had a short play produced on the boards of a music-hall is, to my mind, something distinctly ironical.

For there are, of course, popular elements in most of Mr. Shaw's plays. His wit is bitter and venomous, and might perhaps be regarded as a kind of intellectual red pepper or vinegar to help down the stodginess of the sociological or economic problem around which the play is written. This is an artistic point, however, which appeals to the psychologist and not to the average audience, whether in a music-hall or a theatre. To the audience the wit may be ill-natured, but it is nevertheless wit, and as such they appreciate it—as when, for instance, the chief brigand introduces himself to Tanner by saying, "I am a brigand ; I live by robbing the rich," and Tanner replies, "I am a gentleman ; I live by robbing the poor." This is excellent fooling, and Mr. Shaw gives us plenty of it.

Even in the long preface to *Man and Superman*, however, and in the play itself, Mr. Shaw

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has not room enough to develop his characters, or rather the main character, John Tanner. When we come to the end of the play we find that we have still to read an appendix called *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, more than sixty pages long. This appendix is divided up into sections, each containing a series of aphorisms on such subjects as good breeding, property, marriage, prudery, politics, civilisation, and so forth. It is supposed to be written by John Tanner, the hero of the play, and affords us fairly satisfactory proof that John Tanner and George Bernard Shaw are one and the same person. It is gratifying to note that in it Mr. Shaw does not join in the common yelp for progress; neither apparently does he believe in equality as the word is understood by the average democrat. He states in section nine that we must eliminate the yahoo or his vote will wreck the commonwealth, and he recognises in his preface to the appendix—for Shaw can write nothing without putting a preface to it—that revolutions have never lightened the burden of tyranny; they have only shifted it to another shoulder. Having recounted numerous present-day horrors, Mr. Shaw plumps for evolution as the remedy—we must, he says,

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replace the man by the superman. He has, however, no definite superman in view, as Nietzsche had; Shaw's superman is merely, so far as we can gather, to have better health and more brains than the average man of the present day, and this being will be arrived at by eugenics, or as Mr. Shaw puts it, "The only fundamental and possible Socialism is the socialisation of the selective breeding of man: in other terms of human evolution." This is at best a barren, inartistic remedy. *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, like most of Mr. Shaw's plays, merely indicates the restlessness of his spirit, his full appreciation of the deplorable physical conditions amid which so large a proportion of our population lives, and the equally deplorable intellectual conditions prevalent in higher circles. It shows, too, Mr. Shaw's intense desire to find a remedy for all this, and it proves definitely his incapacity to do so. He gives one the feeling that his rather boyish, good-natured heart is somewhere near the right place, but that his mind is not quite clear—in fact, to put it a little more harshly, that his mind is rather muddled, a state of things by no means uncommon among students of Teutonic philosophy. Mr. Shaw doubtless

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knows that he could find in art and culture a remedy for the evils he recognises ; but unfortunately, as I have already pointed out, he has got into the habit of confusing aristocratic and democratic art. If he did seek to find the remedy in art he would experience great difficulty in deciding which art leads us upwards, and which leads us downwards.

In *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet*, for example—a play remarkable for its preface, which is more than twice as long as the play itself—Mr. Shaw gives us clearly to understand that there are many questions dealing with sexual affairs which he would like to see “discussed” on the stage. He rails against the censorship and against managers also, but he does not recognise that whatever the reasons of the Censor may be, he is much more right from an artistic point of view than Mr. Shaw ; for it is sufficient to condemn the latter’s long arguments by saying that art cannot discuss, that drama is a form of art, and that the stage cannot be used for the sort of propaganda work Mr. Shaw would like to see upon it. Mr. Shaw objects of course to light, frivolous plays, which treat sexual matters with a certain amount of indelicacy and yet at the same

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time with a certain good humour. Mr. Shaw's Puritan mind is shocked by this, and he would like to see such performances replaced by dramas of the type of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, the distinction being that this play deals with sex very seriously indeed, and "discusses" it in a sufficient measure to please, I am sure, even Mr. Shaw. *Blanco Posnet* itself, of course, is not a sexual play, but it deals with a religious subject—a man who "finds God"—which is equally out of place on the stage.

*Getting Married* is an attack, and quite a justifiable one, on English home life as we know it at the present day. It will be some time before Mr. Shaw is forgiven for his grim reference to a certain "forgotten conference of married men" organised by the late Rev. Mr. Hugh Price Hughes. The conference assembled to discuss marriage, but, as Mr. Shaw tells us :

Nothing came of it (nor indeed could have come of it in the absence of women); but it had its value as giving the young sociologists present, of whom I was one, an authentic notion of what a picked audience of respectable men understood by married life. It was certainly a staggering revelation. Peter the Great would have been shocked: Byron would have been horrified; Don Juan would have fled from the conference into a monastery. The respectable men all regarded the marriage ceremony as a rite which absolved them



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from the laws of health and temperance ; inaugurated a lifelong honeymoon ; and placed their pleasures on exactly the same footing as their prayers. It seemed entirely proper and natural to them that out of every twenty-four hours of their lives they should pass eight shut up in one room with their wives alone, and this, not birdlike, for the mating season, but all the year round and every year. How they settled even such minor questions as to which party should decide whether and how much the window should be open and how many blankets should be on the bed, and at what hour they should go to bed and get up so as to avoid disturbing one another's sleep, seemed insoluble questions to me. But the members of the conference did not seem to mind. They were content to have the whole national housing problem treated on a basis of one room for two people. That was the essence of marriage for them.

The preface, of course, contains numerous references to small families, democracy and politics, motherhood, monopoly, old maids, the economic position of women, divorce, white slavery, and so on and so on. As I have said, a passable system of economics could be drawn up from some of the play's references to women in relation to economics. Many points raised by the married state are of course well brought out, such as the difficulty of obtaining a divorce without collusion, even when both parties want one, the fact that a married man is responsible for libellous statements made by

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his wife, and the fact that a woman must remain faithful to her husband even if he becomes insane or is sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. All this, however, does not make *Getting Married* a play, and still less an artistic play. To begin with, the stage is no place for the consideration of any of the problems raised by Mr. Shaw, and in the second place, even if it were, the play corresponds to no rules of dramatic construction either ancient or modern. Indeed, Mr. Shaw warns us about this at the start, for he tells us in a note that "the customary division into acts and scenes has been disused, and a return made to unity of time and place as observed in the ancient Greek drama." We can only say in reply to this that Mr. Shaw must have entirely misunderstood the rules of Greek drama or the very unities he refers to. Aristotle, who was the first critic to speak of unities at all, dealt only with the unity of action, and gave but a very obscure hint about unity of time, while as for unity of place he said not a word about it. It is customary, of course, for superficial writers to refer to Aristotle and his three unities; but one would have thought that Mr. Shaw could have avoided this error. His friend, Mr. Walkley, could have told him

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about it. In other words, Mr. Shaw has chosen a subject which is unfitted for the stage, and he treats of it with an entire disregard of all dramatic technique, either ancient or modern. It is true that the play did have a short run, but the experiment could hardly be called a success.

In spite of these criticisms, however, Mr. Shaw must have his due ; we are indebted to him for a good deal. When I referred in an earlier chapter to the influence of foreign authors such as Verlaine, Flaubert, and various Russian writers upon English literature, I had Shaw chiefly in mind. Whatever else he may have done, let it at least be said to his credit that he made English critics familiar with various aspects of Continental thought, and the acrimonious discussions which many of his protégés raised helped things to sort themselves out to some extent. It was chiefly Shaw who made Ibsen, Wagner, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche familiar to a wide circle, together with many lesser Continental luminaries. He kept himself well in touch with every dynamic movement abroad, whether in painting, music, philosophy, or economics. It is my personal belief that Mr. Shaw entirely misunderstood various phases

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of Nietzsche, that he was quite capable of setting Wagner and Ibsen on a level with him, and that he failed to perceive the malign effect that the Scandinavian drama was likely to exercise on art. Nevertheless the fact that he could take an interest in these things at all sets him at once on a higher level than his contemporaries. It is true that Mr. William Archer and Mr. Edmund Gosse also became known in connection with Scandinavian writers, and the name of Mr. Archer is almost inseparable from that of Ibsen. These gentlemen, however, estimable though their merits are, could not claim anything like the wide range of general knowledge possessed by Mr. Shaw. They have written well on Scandinavian literature, and there is some originality in their own creative work, but they never wrote so brilliantly as Mr. Shaw, and they have never written on such a wide range of subjects.

There are, as I suggest in the essay in this book which deals with Mr. Wells, two publics—one the small artistic public, and the other the great uncultured middle-class public. Mr. Wells, in my opinion, has recognised the distinction, and chosen to appeal to the larger public; but Mr. Shaw looks upon the whole

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mass with contempt. In his work he has paid no particular attention to form, and he rains his blows with equal heartiness upon the pure classical artistic tradition and the heads of the philistine mob. From an artistic point of view, therefore, we cannot award Mr. Shaw any very high praise. His works, I think, are destined to perish before the century is up, partly because they are formless, and partly because the subjects his plays deal with are ephemeral. Æschylus, Sophocles, and Aristophanes still interest us because their plays deal with humanity, and as the nature of man is unchanging an interval of one, two, three, or four thousand years makes little difference. Mr. Shaw's plays, however, do not deal with humanity, nor even with one phase of humanity, but rather with the political or sociological problems of one phase of humanity—matters which may be of interest to two or three generations, but hardly to two or three score.

Though we must condemn Mr. Shaw as an artist, however, my sympathies are entirely with him when I see him pitted against the dull, stupid, philistine British public. It is the business of a cultured man to be able to appreciate new points of view, to weigh them care-

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fully and to decide for or against ; but even Englishmen who pass for cultured cannot bring themselves to do this—in fact, it is becoming year by year a matter of greater difficulty to induce them to buy or to read books at all ; even the upper classes and noble families have begun to “go in for” trade, and too much commercialism is sufficient to spoil the culture of any nation. When therefore we find Mr. Shaw attacking modern society, or distribution of wealth, or marriage, or the numerous other things with which he has dealt, we must recognise that his remarks are often fully justified. As a dynamic force he has not often led us upwards, and when he has done so he has not led us very far in that direction ; but he has at all events not stood still. Let Mr. G. K. Chesterton add a final word in his favour :

He has obliterated the mere cynic ; he has been so much more cynical than any one else for the public good that no one has dared since to be really cynical for anything smaller. The Chinese crackers of the frivolous cynics fail to excite us after the dynamite of the serious and aspiring cynic. Bernard Shaw and I (who are growing grey together) can remember an epoch which many of his followers do not know ; an epoch of real pessimism. The years from 1885 to 1898 were like the hours of afternoon in a rich house with large rooms ; the hours before teatime. They believed in nothing except good manners ; and the

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essence of good manners is to conceal a yawn. A yawn may be defined as a silent yell. The power which the young pessimist of that time showed in this direction would have astonished any one but him : he yawned so wide as to swallow the world ; he swallowed the world like an unpleasant pill before retiring to eternal rest. Now the last and best glory of Shaw is that in the circles where this creature was found, he is not. He has not been killed (I do not know exactly why), but he is actually turned into a Shaw idealist. This is no exaggeration. I meet men, who, when I knew them in 1898, were just a little too lazy to destroy the universe. They are now conscious of not being quite worthy to abolish some prison regulations. This destruction and conversion seems to me the mark of something actually great ; it is always great to destroy a type without destroying a man. The followers of Shaw are optimists ; some of them are so simple as even to use the word. They are sometimes rather pallid optimists ; frequently they are worried optimists ; occasionally, to tell the truth, rather cross optimists : but they are not pessimists ; they can exult though they cannot laugh. He has at least withered up among them the mere pose of impossibility. Like every great teacher, he has cursed the barren fig-tree.

## CHAPTER VII

H. G. WELLS

WE may, if we choose, consider Mr. H. G. Wells from two very different points of view. At present he is best known to the general public as a writer of scientific novels; but from about 1904 to 1909 he became particularly well-known in political and sociological circles as one of the reformers of our social system. His name during this time was associated with the Fabian Society, and there are still large masses of people, wherever English is read, to whom Mr. Wells the sociologist is of much more importance than Mr. Wells the novelist. This is at least one resemblance which can easily be traced between Mr. Wells and Mr. Shaw. Both of them aimed at literature, both of them were ardent social reformers, and both of them spoiled their literature by their ideas of social reform, and could not carry out or initiate the social reforms they had in mind owing to the influence which their own literary ideas had upon them.



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The artist will instinctively feel an objection to Mr. Wells's work in reading through his books, and it is an objection which at first it is not easy to define. For Mr. Wells at the first reading seems to display much constructive ability in his work, a fine technique, and imagination of quite an unusual kind. Scattered through his books, too, there are very many apt phrases, and occasional deft "touches," which, while they may or may not add to the charm of the book, are at all events clever—as, for example, when a character in *Kipps* says of the lives of drapers' assistants: "I tell you we're in a blessed drain-pipe, and we've got to crawl along it till we die"; or that little scene in Chapter I of *Tono Bungay*:

Then perhaps Mrs. Booch would produce a favourite piece from her repertoire. "The evenings are drawing out nicely," she would say, or, if the season was decadent, "How the evenings draw in!" It was an invaluable remark to her; I do not know how she would have got along without it. My mother, who sat with her back to the window, would always consider it due to Mrs. Booch to turn about and regard the evening in the act of elongation or contraction, whichever phrase it might be.

Little scenes and phrases like these could be matched in almost any book by Mr. Wells; but, unfortunately, they remain in the memory

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even after the characters, the plot, and the general aspect of the story have been forgotten. I say unfortunately, because it cannot be too highly emphasised that it is an artistic defect for the part to be greater than the whole. If we go back to any of the great masters of the English novel, such as Henry Fielding or Samuel Richardson, we shall, I think, generally find that the recollection of a particular scene or phrase recalls to us the whole environment of the scene or the phrase, because in their works the part does not become greater than the whole, and the artistic harmony and unity of the work are preserved throughout. But scenes and phrases in Mr. Wells's works are very often like merely superfluous ornaments, pieces of mosaic which may be stuck on or pulled off at will. If any of Mr. Wells's admirers does me the honour of reading these lines, he may think that such an objection is a purely pedantic one. But it is not ; it merely arises from the fundamental distinction between what is art and what is not art. Mr. Wells is anything you like—an interesting personality, a clever writer, a man of brilliant scientific imagination, an ardent social reformer, a leader of English thought, even—but his works are not artistic

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works ; not at all events in the sense in which we speak of the works of a novelist like Fielding as artistic works. We may, if we like, set them on a very much inferior plane—we may describe them as the works of a self-made artist.

Not merely America but the whole world has provided us, more particularly within the last half-century, with coarse examples of the self-made business man—men who have struggled against adversity in early life to a commanding position. Socially many of these people are tolerated, but only just tolerated, on account of their wealth, for those who have come into contact with the average South African diamond dealer or Chicago pork butcher must acknowledge that they have few other attractions. In most cases their early struggles leave indelible marks upon their mentality and entirely distort their outlook on life. These factors, of course, make it impossible for them to be artists or to take an interest in art. I am not thinking of a man like Mr. Pierpont Morgan, who was born into a fairly wealthy family, who had no early struggles to endure, and who has consequently not only preserved but developed his artistic sense. I am thinking rather of a

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man like Mr. Carnegie and of numerous lesser individualities like him, who do not come quite so prominently before the public. The real artist, to continue the analogy—if such an analogy may be permitted—is of the Morgan type. The real artist, that is to say, will have no early artistic struggles to endure, for, as the result of artistic tradition on both sides of his family, he will be born with all the requisite artistic instincts, which will then only require purely natural development. The works of such an artist, whether they take the form of music, painting, poetry, sculpture, or architectural designs, will be marked from beginning to end by an entire freedom from effort—there will be no signs of a deadly struggle as between the artist and something that appears to be hindering his progress, no sense of weariness, nothing to show that the work has not been produced perfect and finished as by magic at a moment's notice.

Far different will be the case of those men who endeavour to act as artists without having been born with this artistic tradition. In the best of cases particular attention to technique and construction may deceive even the skilled critic at the first reading of a book or the first

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glance at a picture. In the worst of cases we shall be painfully conscious of the halting efforts of the person who is endeavouring to appeal to us—his fingers will be coarse, as Nietzsche would say. The non-artistic book will result from the exercise of the reason as opposed to the imagination—science, in fact, as opposed to art. Mr. Wells's books show an ingenious play of the scientific faculty, but little artistic imagination.

The distinction between the terms can easily be made clear. When an author creates a character or a series of characters, he is undoubtedly making use of artistic imagination in some form. It may be high imagination, as in the case of the writers of the *Vedas* or Homer or Shakespeare, or it may be a lower form of imagination, such as we find in the novels of Jane Austen. But when a writer merely makes a careful study of modern science, endeavours to forecast what it may develop into in the course of the next three or four centuries, and weaves a story accordingly, he is making use of a purely scientific imagination. Novelists of this latter class are a product of the nineteenth century—perhaps Mr. Shaw, in describing them, would make use of one of his

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favourite expressions and say that they were a by-product. Two of them stand out prominently. One of them is the amiable Frenchman, Jules Verne, whose books have delighted schoolboys and even older folks for a generation. Mr. Wells's imagination does not differ in kind from that of Jules Verne. It differs somewhat in degree; it is a little wider, a little higher, a little more omnivorous; but otherwise most of his books are on precisely the same level as *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. It is quite obvious, for example, that in books like *The Food of the Gods*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Sleeper Awakes*, *The First Men in the Moon*, *The Wonderful Visit*, *The War in the Air*, and *The War of the Worlds*, the characters have not been created in the artistic sense at all. They are merely puppets, marionettes, introduced for the purpose of setting off a story about flying machines, escalators, and a peculiar form of food. The artist would have thought first of all of Mr. Bensington and Mr. Redwood, and out of the imagination with which he would have endowed them the food of the gods would have come. But Mr. Wells's scientific researches in Kensington made him think first of all of the food of the gods, and

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Mr. Bensington, Mr. Redwood, and the other characters of this particular book were all sketched with painful exactitude merely for the purpose of introducing the food of the gods to the public. But one or two clever touches about the influence exercised on English families by certain vinegary types of females will remain in the reader's mind even when he has forgotten all about the giant rats and the lame conclusion of the last chapter: "Cousin Jane, indeed!" says Cossar. "I know her. Rot these Cousin Janes! Country infested with 'em!"

On the other hand, when Mr. Wells forsakes his science he still refuses to give us a purely imaginative story; he insists instead upon giving us sociological novels, and the sociology simply takes the place of science. There is no artistic unity, for example, about *Tono Bungay*; there is not a character in it with whom we can adequately sympathise or in whom we can take any interest. The really artistic novelist works from character to plot, and not from plot to character. But all the characters in *Tono Bungay* do nothing in particular; we are simply told by the author that something is actually done by them. For example, "Uncle "

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Ponderevo is at first a chemist in an obscure country town, and in a few years, as the result of the sale of a patent medicine, becomes a great financier. But Mr. Wells does not show us how this is possible for a man possessing only abilities such as those with which he has endowed this particular character. In real life, George's uncle would have ended precisely as we find him in the opening chapters of the book, discontented with his lot, quarrelling with his neighbours, and probably beating his wife. On the other hand, if we admit that the man possessed abilities which Mr. Wells has not shown us, his career would not have reached the sudden termination which we are told it did.

*Tono Bungay*, I presume, cannot have been written merely "to give a view of the whole strange advertising, commercialised civilisation of which London is the centre," as Mr. Wells states in *T.P.'s Magazine* for December 1911; for in that case a great deal of the introductory matter and the details of George's love affairs would be unnecessary. Neither can it have been written to show us how George Ponderevo invented a flying machine. It was not written, I think, for the purpose of introducing certain created characters to the world, for characters



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put into a novel should at least act in harmony, and should have some definite reason for being there. Perhaps in writing *Tono Bungay* Mr. Wells was unconsciously influenced by a desire to show from a sociological standpoint the evil effects of the modern financial system, and of the environment, aristocratic and otherwise, surrounding a typical English village like Bladesover. Towards the end of Book I we find Mr. Wells sticking on a piece of mosaic in order that he may attack English houses. He objects, and rightly, to the absence of bathroom in so many cases, the insufficient accommodation, and the ludicrous manner in which landlords endeavour to adapt mid-Victorian buildings to modern requirements. This, indeed, is one of the subjects Mr. Wells has very much at heart, for he refers to it again in *Kipps*. Mrs. Kipps wants "cubbuds" and has tender feelings for the servant, and poor Kipps in the end is forced to set about building a house for himself. But in *Kipps*, as in *Tono Bungay*, or *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, we view the characters with a very mild, lukewarm approval; we cannot sympathise with them. We have a feeling that they are absolutely unimportant people; people whom it is not

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worth writing about. What on earth, for example, does Kipps matter to us, or the Walsinghams, or Mr. Coote? Why should we be expected to take an interest in the sentimentality of Mr. Lewisham, who goes back to his first love, Ethel, or in the even more disgusting sentimentality of Mr. Kipps, who goes back to his first love, Ann? We cannot answer these questions without considering what real artists have put into the novel, and comparing this with what Mr. Wells has put into it. No scullion is a genius; but it has been well said of Balzac that "even his scullions have genius." None of Mr. Wells's characters have genius, and even if Mr. Wells himself had any to put into them it is evident that he would try to avoid doing so. For Mr. Wells has published an article giving his views on the novel,\* and he has written a short account of his career † which is very illuminating indeed when we seek to ascertain the origin of much of his work.

In *The Fortnightly Review* article Mr. Wells

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\* *The Fortnightly Review*, November 1911.

† This was written by Mr. Wells as an introduction to the Russian translation of some of his books. It was published in English in *T.P.'s Magazine* for December 1911.

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sets forth his claims for what he regards as the ideal novel :

It is to be the social mediator, the vehicle of understanding, the instrument of self-examination, the parade of morals and the exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the criticism of law and institutions and of social dogmas and ideas. It is to be the home confessional, the initiator of knowledge, the seed of fruitful self-questioning. Let me be very clear here. I do not mean for a moment that the novelist is going to set up as a teacher, as a sort of priest with a pen, who will make men and women believe and do this and that. The novel is not a new sort of pulpit ; humanity is passing out of the phase when men sit under preachers and dogmatic influences. But the novelist is going to be the most potent of artists, because he is going to present conduct, devise beautiful conduct, discuss conduct, analyse conduct, suggest conduct, illuminate it through and through. He will not teach, but discuss, point out, plead and display. And this being my view you will be prepared for the demand I am now about to make for an absolutely free hand for the novelist in his choice of topic and incident and in his method of treatment ; or rather, if I may presume to speak for other novelists, I would say it is not so much a demand we make as an intention we proclaim. We are going to write, subject only to our own limitations, about the whole of human life. We are going to deal with political questions and social questions. We cannot present people unless we have this free hand, this unrestricted field. What is the good of telling stories about people's lives if one may not deal freely with the religious beliefs and organisations that have controlled or failed to control them ? What is the good of pre-

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tending to write about love, and the loyalties and treacheries and quarrels of men and women, if one must not glance at those varieties of physical temperament and organic quality, those deeply passionate needs and distresses from which half the storms of human life are brewed? We are going to write about it all. We are going to write about business and finance and politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum, until a thousand pretences and ten thousand impostures shrivel in the cold, clear air of our elucidations. We are going to write of wasted opportunities and latent beauties until a thousand new ways of living open to men and women. We are going to appeal to the young and the hopeful and the curious, against the established, the dignified, and defensive. Before we have done, we will have all life within the scope of the novel.

We have no reason to doubt that Mr. Wells sincerely believes in the views he advocates here, for he certainly endeavours to conform to them in his own novels. From this standpoint, therefore, he cannot well be criticised; but we are certainly at liberty to criticise the opinions he advocates. They are, in my opinion, contradictory and would tend to degrade the modern novel to the level of a Fabian Society pamphlet on a large scale—indeed many of the sociological criticisms put forward in Mr. Wells's novels (*The New Machiavelli*, for example, or *Tono Bungay*) might be taken straight from Fabian tracts. Mr. Wells tells us that

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the novelist is not going to set up as a teacher ; but among other things he is going to “ discuss conduct, analyse conduct, suggest conduct.” It really amounts to the same thing in the end. If a novelist is capable of doing everything suggested by Mr. Wells, he is bound to be the intellectual superior of the common herd of men and women, and in such a case he is certain to hold definite opinions which he will lose no opportunity of advocating. He will not advocate them like a priest of the Church of Rome, who would merely have to give a word of command to an obedient flock ; but he will advocate them in the much less noble and less aristocratic fashion of a dissenting parson, who is always prepared for an indefinite amount of “ discussion.” The very emphasis, indeed, which Mr. Wells lays upon discussion shows how far the novelist has fallen under his guidance from a high literary standard. It would be difficult to find any kind of discussion in really first-class novels—not even Sancho Panza’s proverbs come under this head, by a long way.

Nor is the cause of this at all recondite. The novel is one of the lowest forms, if not the lowest form, of creative art, but it is nevertheless a form of creative art. Art ceases to be

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art when it begins to discuss. Like the Church of Rome, it is aristocratic in its nature; its message is flung to the world and must be taken or left. Those who can really appreciate that message will seize upon it, make it their own, and attach various artistic meanings to it; but they will certainly not "discuss" it. Artistic messages are only "discussed" by those who cannot clearly understand them. The decline of art in Greece gradually led to the rise of men like Socrates, Plato, and their numerous followers, to whom dialectics, quibbles, and hair-splitting disputes came almost naturally. We must assume, then, that Mr. Wells takes a remarkably low view of art when he suggests that the coming "artist" who writes novels is going to "discuss" problems, especially problems of conduct. But worse than this is to follow, for Mr. Wells tells us that this novelist of his will not teach but plead. This is indeed the very antithesis of art. Art commands. It gives you an imperious message, but it never pleads.

Those artists who actually do know definitely what their life's calling means, and those cultured people who instinctively recognise what the artist ought and ought not to do, will natur-

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ally think that Mr. Wells holds a rather low opinion of the novel, accentuating it by telling us that the coming artist will not merely discuss and plead—which no artist would think of doing—but that he is in particular to discuss and plead in behalf of conduct. By “conduct” Mr. Wells refers to religious beliefs and love—the two most important factors which influence the lives of men and women and decide their actions for good or evil. Mr. Wells, in short, wishes the novelist to discuss various aspects of morality; for religion itself and the relations of the sexes are the two main features summed up in this word. To refute Mr. Wells it is hardly necessary to quote two of his contemporaries against him, Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symons, who both held very definite views on the relationship which art bears to morality. The moment a novelist begins to discuss conduct he ceases to be imaginative and he ceases to be an artist. The remark applies of course to Mr. Wells himself as much as to the ideal novelist whose appearance he so eagerly awaits. I have already referred to some of Mr. Wells’s books, such as *The Food of the Gods* and *The First Men in the Moon*, which show the use he makes of his scientific knowledge. There is

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just as little trace of artistic imagination in his more ambitious works, such as *The New Machiavelli*, *Tono Bungay*, *Anticipations*, or *A Modern Utopia*. To do Mr. Wells justice, he does not wish either *Anticipations*, *Mankind in the Making*, or *A Modern Utopia* to be treated as novels, but rather as works on sociology. But they are disfigured from the artistic point of view by a fault which is common also to novels like *The War in the Air*, and that is the great emphasis laid upon the development of machinery. The artistic mind and the purely mechanical or engineering mind never go together, and no artist could make use of his imagination to devise machinery such as that employed by the strange race with which Mr. Wells has peopled the moon. Even in his short stories we are confronted with this fault, the introduction of the scientist instead of the artist. In *The Country of the Blind*—a collection of thirty-three short stories—we find some typical examples, such as *The Cone*, *The Flowering of the Strange Orchid*, *The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes*, *Under the Knife*, *The Plattner Story*, and several others.

As I have already intimated, when Mr. Wells leaves the purely scientific side of novel-writing,



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he does not turn to creative work so much as to sociology, and if we may judge from what he has written he is at one with a vast number of men and women of the present day in regarding sexual problems as one of the most important features of our social life. Why sex has come to be so regarded may, I think, be explained in a very short space. The democratic requirements of the nineteenth century, particularly in Teutonic countries, and above all in England, laid ever greater stress on the importance of woman in the community, and enthusiastically advocated the raising of her status. The obvious facts of everyday life were in themselves a sufficient refutation of the sentimental arguments which would have led us to raise woman to the level of man; but unfortunately men like Bentham and Mill, to mention only two prominent Liberal reformers of the last century, were not men whom obvious facts could convince. Their philosophical tendencies led them unconsciously to idealise everything that did not appeal to them, to cast a romantic halo round the awkward facts which contradicted the principles they advocated. These remarks apply, of course, not merely to the philosophers just

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referred to, but to all their followers and many of their contemporaries. Men who are in other respects far apart, such as Professor Hobhouse, Mr. George Bernard Shaw, and Mr. H. G. Wells, have all a common bond in their desire to "raise" women to the higher level. A great deal has already been done towards making woman economically independent—the Married Women's Property Act, for example; but it is not economically, apparently, but rather sexually that thinkers like Mr. Wells and Mr. Shaw would like to see woman made independent. Mr. Wells—judging, of course, merely from his published works—simply advocates absolute equality in the relations between the sexes. His views on the point are advocated with particular clearness and emphasis in *Ann Veronica* and *The New Machiavelli*.

All that need be said about the present sexual agitation in England is that infinitely too much importance is attached to it. Thanks to the efforts of a previous generation, women of the present day find themselves raised to a certain intellectual level for which their training has not fitted them, and where, to tell the truth, most of them feel rather uncom-

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fortable. If the pompous phraseology of sexual reformers is to be believed, woman is now to take her place by the side of man as his intellectual companion—a place which the average woman is certainly not fitted to take. On the other hand, the greater freedom of expression permitted to the modern woman has led her to debate the subject of sex much more openly than formerly, and this very debating of course has led to much greater importance being attached to the question than need have been the case. Where the average man is concerned, sex is purely an incidental matter—not exactly a joke, but still something which need not be bothered about too seriously. Sex, on the other hand, is the one and only asset of the average woman; hence she takes it very seriously indeed, as do all the effeminate males who “sympathise” with the “movement.” Remington, the hero of *The New Machiavelli*, is obsessed by sex. This is obvious all through the book, but it is particularly obvious in Chapter IV, where he sets down his views with exactitude :

I have already compared the lot of the modern publicist to Machiavelli writing in his study: in his day women and sex were as disregarded in these high

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affairs as, let us say, the chemistry of air or the will of the beasts in the fields ; in ours the case has altogether changed, and woman has come now to stand beside the tall candles, half in the light, half in the mystery of the shadows, besetting, interrupting, demanding unrelentingly an altogether unprecedented attention. I feel that in these matters my life has been almost typical of my time. Woman insists upon her presence. She is no longer a mere physical need, an æsthetic by-play, a sentimental background ; she is a moral and intellectual necessity in a man's life. She comes to the politician and demands, Is she a child or a citizen ? Is she a thing or a soul ? She comes to the individual man, as she came to me, and asks, Is she a cherished weakling or an equal mate, an unavoidable helper ? Is she to be tried and trusted or guarded and controlled, bound or free ? For if she is a mate, one must at once trust more and exact more, exacting toil, courage, and the hardest, most necessary thing of all, the clearest, most shameless, explicitness of understanding.

When it is recollected that in the very first chapter of the book Remington compares himself to Machiavelli, we can only say that this is far from being the view of the matter that the great Florentine himself would have taken. The real Machiavelli had a wife and child, and many other love affairs in addition ; but he never let his wife, his baby, or his mistresses interfere in the slightest degree with his diplomacy or his writings. Remington, the new Machiavelli, on the other hand, after ceasing

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to love his wife Margaret, finds it necessary to choose between his career as a statesman and his mistress Isabel. Isabel, it seems, hungers for children and wants to have Remington all to herself. These things are made known to us at an interview between Remington and Isabel after the hero has just been returned for Handitch. With the exception of a few passages in *Ann Veronica*, I can recall no more disgustingly sentimental and inartistic scene in English or any other literature :

“ You’ve done a great thing this time,” she said. “ Handitch will make you.”

“ It opens big chances,” I said. “ But why are you weeping, dear one ? ”

“ Envy,” she said, “ and love.”

“ You’re not lonely ? ”

“ I’ve plenty to do—and lots of people.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I want you.”

“ You’ve got me.”

She put her arm about me and kissed me. “ I want you,” she said, “ just as if I had nothing of you. You don’t understand—how a woman wants a man. I thought once if I just gave myself to you it would be enough. It was nothing—it was just a step across the threshold. My dear, every moment you are away I ache for you—ache ! I want to be about when it isn’t love-making or talk. I want to be doing things for you, and watching you when you’re not thinking of me. All those safe, careless, intimate things. And something else——” She stopped.

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"Dear, I don't want to bother you. I just want you to know I love you——"

She caught my head in her hands and kissed it, then stood up abruptly.

I looked up at her, a little perplexed.

"Dear heart," said I, "isn't this enough? You're my councillor, my colleague, my right hand, the secret soul of my life——"

"And I want to darn your socks," she said, smiling back at me.

"You're insatiable."

She smiled. "No," she said, "I'm not insatiable, master. But I'm a woman in love. And I'm finding out what I want, and what is necessary to me—and what I can't have. That's all."

"We get a lot."

"We want a lot. You and I are greedy people for the things we like. It's very evident we've got nearly all we can ever have of one another—and I'm not satisfied."

"What more is there?"

"For you—very little. I wonder. For me—everything. Yes—everything."

"You didn't mean it; you didn't know any more than I did when I began, but love between a man and a woman is sometimes very one-sided. Fearfully one-sided! That's all——"

"Don't you ever want children?" she said abruptly.

"I suppose I do."

"You don't!"

"I haven't thought of them."

"A man doesn't, perhaps. But I have. . . . I want them—like hunger. YOUR children, and home with you. Really, continually you! That's the trouble. . . . I can't have 'em, and I can't have you."

She was crying, and through her tears she laughed.

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"I'm going to make a scene," she said, "and get this over. I'm so discontented and miserable; I've got to tell you. It would come between us if I didn't. I'm in love with you, with everything—with all my brains. I'll pull through all right. I'll be good, never you fear. But to-day I'm crying out with all my being. This election—you're going up; you're going on. In these papers—you're a great big fact. It's suddenly come home to me. At the back of my mind I've always had the idea I was going to have you somehow presently for myself—I mean to have you to go long tramps with, to keep house for, to get meals for, to watch for of an evening. It's a sort of habitual background to my thought of you. And it's nonsense—utter nonsense!" She stopped. She was crying and choking. "And the child, you know—the child!"

We know, of course, what is going to follow. The lovers make a few ineffective attempts to part; but they cannot, and in spite of the entreaties of his political friends, especially Britten, Remington renounces his promising career and goes off with Isabel. Not so Machiavelli, when he thought his country wanted him: "I would they employed me," he cries. "I would they employed me were it only to roll stones, for if I could not then win them over, it would be my fault and not fortune's."

Those who wish for a very complete comparison of the two Machiavellis will find it in an interesting essay by Mr. A. E. Randall in

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Volume VIII of *The New Age*; but before leaving Remington altogether I should like to refer again to his views on women as set forth above. It is simply untrue to suggest that there is such an enormous difference between the woman of the twentieth century and the woman of the sixteenth. She may not, to use Remington's own phrase, "insist upon her presence" as much as she likes; but whether she has her way or not will depend upon the man on whom she forces her insistence. Napoleon was greatly influenced by women; but they did not interfere with his campaigns or his plans, so successfully carried out, for the complete reorganisation of the French Administration. If Napoleon is not sufficiently modern to satisfy Mr. Wells, let him inquire how many women tried to insist upon their presence where Bismarck was concerned, and how he dealt with them. The truth is, woman has always tried to insist upon her presence in every age and in every country. Whether she was successful or not depended entirely upon the virile qualities of the man she had to deal with. There are large numbers of men to-day who can be influenced as Remington was influenced—their number perhaps is larger than



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at any former period, with the exception of those early decades of the Christian era when the Roman Empire was practically governed by the women connected with the court and not by the men. But even at the present day there are men, though their number may be relatively small, who would, like the real Machiavelli, willingly see the whole female sex at the bottom of the sea if they thought for a moment it would tend to interfere with their ambitious designs. Whether, to come back to Remington, a woman is a moral and intellectual necessity in a man's life depends merely on the woman and the man. As a general statement Remington's opinion is not worth serious consideration.

We have not done, however, with this scene between Remington and Isabel, or rather this conversation between them. To say that it is almost like what would happen in real life would possibly be considered by a few of the old-fashioned critics as a compliment to the book ; but from the artistic point of view it is rather a defect. Before proceeding to discuss this point, let us take one or two conversations between certain of Mr. Wells's characters who are somewhat lower in the social scale. In

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Chapter VI of *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, Mr. Lewisham takes "Love," that is Ethel, out for a walk :

"Let us go on now," she said abruptly. "The rain has stopped."

"That little path goes straight to Immering," said Mr. Lewisham.

"But, four o'clock?"

He drew out his watch, and his eyebrows went up. It was already nearly a quarter past four.

"Is it past four?" she asked, and abruptly they were face to face with parting. That Lewisham had to take "duty" at half-past five seemed a thing utterly trivial. "Surely," he said, only slowly realising what this parting meant. "But must you? I—I want to talk to you."

"Haven't you been talking to me?"

"It isn't that. Besides—no."

She stood looking at him. "I promised to be home by four," she said. "Mrs. Frobisher has tea——"

"We may never have a chance to see one another again."

"Well?"

Lewisham suddenly turned very white.

"Don't leave me," he said, breaking a tense silence, and with a sudden stress in his voice. "Don't leave me. Stop with me yet for a little while. . . . You . . . you can lose your way."

"You seem to think," she said, forcing a laugh, "that I live without eating and drinking."

"I have wanted to talk to you so much. The first time I saw you. . . . At first I dared not. . . . I did not know you would let me talk. . . . And now, just as I am happy, you are going."

He stopped abruptly. Her eyes were downcast,

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"No," she said, tracing a curve with the point of her shoe. "No. I am not going." Lewisham restrained an impulse to shout. "You will come to Immering?" he cried, and as they went along the narrow path through the wet grass, he began to tell her with simple frankness how he cared for her company. "I would not change this," he said, casting about for an offer to reject, "for—anything in the world. . . . I shall not be back for duty. I don't care. I don't care what happens so long as we have this afternoon."

"Nor I," she said.

"Thank you for coming," he said in an outburst of gratitude. "Oh, thank you for coming," and held out his hand. She took it and pressed it, and so they went on hand in hand until the village street was reached. Their high resolve to play truant at all costs had begotten a wonderful sense of fellowship. "I can't call you Miss Henderson," he said. "You know I can't. You know . . . I must have your Christian name."

"Ethel," she told him.

"Ethel," he said, and looked at her, gathering courage as he did so.

"Ethel," he repeated. "It is a pretty name. But no name is quite pretty enough for you, Ethel . . . dear."

Turning to Book III of *Kipps*, we find that the hero's uncle has not yet accustomed himself to the change in his nephew's fortunes :

But there remained something in his manner towards Ann—in the glances of scrutiny he gave her unawares, that kept Kipps alertly expansive whenever he was about ; and in all sorts of ways. It was on account of old Kipps, for example, that our Kipps

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plunged one day—a golden plunge—and brought home a box of cummerbundy ninepenny cigars, and substituted blue label old Methuselah Four Stars for the common and generally satisfactory white brand.

“Some of this is whisky, my boy,” said old Kipps, when he tasted it, smacking critical lips. . . .

“Saw a lot of young officery fellers coming along,” said old Kipps. “You ought to join the volunteers, my boy, and get to know a few.”

“I dessay I shall,” said Kipps. “Later.”

“They’d make you an officer, you know, ’n no time. They want officers,” said old Kipps. “It isn’t every one can afford it. They’d be regular glad to ’ave you. . . . Ain’t bort a dog yet?”

“Not yet, uncle. ’Ave a segar?”

“Nor a moty car?”

“Not yet, uncle.”

“There’s no ’urry about that. And don’t get one of these ’ere trashy cheap ones when you do get it, my boy. Get one as’ll last a lifetime. . . . I’m surprised you don’t ’ire a bit more.”

“Ann don’t seem to fency a moty car,” said Kipps.

“Ah,” said old Kipps, “I expect not,” and glanced a comment at the door. “She ain’t used to going out,” he said. “More at ’ome indoors.”

“Fact is,” said Kipps hastily, “we’re thinking of building a ’ouse.”

“I wouldn’t do that, my boy,” began old Kipps; but his nephew was routing in the chiffonier drawer amidst the plans. He got them in time to check some further comment on Ann. “Um,” said the old gentleman, a little impressed by the extraordinary odour and the unusual transparency of the tracing-paper Kipps put into his hands.

“Thinking of building a ’ouse, are you?”

Kipps began with the most modest of the three projects.

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Old Kipps read slowly through his silver-rimmed spectacles, "Plan of a 'ouse for Arthur Kipps, Esquire. Um."

He didn't warm to the project all at once, and Ann drifted into the room to find him still scrutinizing the architect's proposals a little doubtfully.

"We couldn't find a decent 'ouse anywhere," said Kipps, leaning against the table and assuming an off-hand note. "I didn't see why we shouldn't run up one for ourselves." Old Kipps could not help liking the tone of that.

"We thought we might see——" said Ann.

"It's a spekerlation, of course," said old Kipps, and held the plan at a distance of two feet or more from his glasses and frowned. "This isn't exactly the 'ouse I should expect you to have thought of, though," he said. "Practically it's a villa. It's the sort of 'ouse a bank clerk might 'ave. 'Tisn't what I should call a gentleman's 'ouse, Artie."

"It's plain, of course," said Kipps, standing beside his uncle and looking down at this plan, which certainly did seem a little less magnificent now than it had at the first encounter.

"You mustn't 'ave it too plain," said old Kipps.

"If it's comfortable——" Ann hazarded.

Old Kipps glanced at her over his spectacles. "You ain't comfortable, my gel, in this world, not if you don't live up to your position," so putting compactly into contemporary English that fine old phrase *Noblesse oblige*. "A 'ouse of this sort is what a retired tradesman might 'ave, or some little whipper-snapper of a s'licitor. But you——"

"Course that isn't the on'y plan," said Kipps, and tried the middle one.

But it was the third one won over old Kipps. "Now that's a 'ouse, my boy," he said, at the sight of it.

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These conversations are well done, and they may interest and amuse us to some extent ; but they are not what we can conscientiously call artistic, and they do not entitle Mr. Wells to the leading place he occupies among our present-day novelists. No doubt, however, they conform to Mr. Wells's ambition to have all life in a novel. It is just this ambition of Mr. Wells which, it seems to me, is so directly opposed to art. The artist cannot take life as it stands, and throw it into a novel or on canvas. It is the task of the artist not merely to create, but to select and interpret—to re-create nature for us by reinterpreting her ; to make life valuable and pleasing to us by bringing harmony into its discords and restoring order to its chaos. This is the work of the artist in the widest sense of the word, for the artist who can thus interpret what is obscure must comprise within himself the highest types of poet, philosopher, and priest. Low though the novel may stand in the scale of art-forms, it is nevertheless entitled to rank as one when properly written. But, like all art-forms, it can in no circumstance be used as an instrument of political, sociological, economic or other propaganda. Wherever such propaganda is

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attempted, the result is a loss to the art of the novel in exactly the same way as the attempted propaganda of any sociological question on the stage results in the degradation of the art of the drama.

It follows, then, that the real artist must not set out in print conversations exactly as they might have taken place in ordinary life. He must select from them, or rather condense them considerably. Guy de Maupassant, for example, would never let conversations between his characters extend over two or three pages of print, as Mr. Wells often does. His artistic faculty of selection would have led him to take one or two typical sentences, or rather out of a number of sentences he would have formed one apparently typical, and yet really so condensed and explicit as to let us penetrate into the inner minds of his characters more easily than if we had read perhaps a couple of pages of their actual conversation.

As to the use of the novel as a means of propagating new ideas, I only wish I could apply to Mr. Wells the praise which Luís Alfonso has so deservedly bestowed upon Pedro Antonio de Alarcón: "What problem is he concerned with? That of writing novels with-

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out intricate or terrifying plots: without supreme efforts, without tiresome expedients, and to see whether he cannot finally succeed—as he actually does succeed—in peacefully recreating the mind of his reader without exciting or irritating him. . . . He has shown himself to be a superb and talented painter—he neither is nor wishes to appear to be a philosopher, a historian, or a moralist, but simply a narrator.”

I do not say that in this simple though excellent piece of criticism Luís Alfonso has adequately and entirely summed up the good points of a novelist; but he has certainly covered many of them. It is emphatically the purpose of novelists of the Wells school to excite and disturb the reader's mind. They wish to force upon our attention problems relating to sociology, politics, or philosophy, whether we care to listen to them or not. It never seems to occur to them that problems of this nature cannot be dealt with by the creative artist, but by minds of quite a different order, and most emphatically not in novels. Of course men of genius, like Nietzsche, Aristotle, or Lao Tsu, are at liberty to turn their attention to political or sociological problems, if they



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feel so inclined ; but in such a case they content themselves with stating luminous general principles without attempting to burrow among the pettifogging details so dear to the hearts of many English novelists whom it would be easy to name. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, for example, Mr. Wells is not content to deal with new forms of locomotion and State organisation ; but he provides us in addition with a revised system of numerals, so that we meet with phrases like "two dozand of men." If, however, instead of devising new systems of numerals and prophesying about new forms of locomotion, Mr. Wells had set himself to the task of devising a new character or characters, most of us who look for a certain amount of art in novels would be much better satisfied. In spite of what some of his admirers say about his interest in humanity, it has always appeared to me that interest in humanity, as such, is precisely what Mr. Wells lacks. He is interested in men in so far as they may serve to set off some story about a new invention, or to illustrate a sociological or political principle. But in man, purely and simply as man, Mr. Wells seems to manifest no particular interest at all. In *The Sleeper Awakes*, to take an instance, his descrip-

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tions of the new mechanical inventions which we may expect to see in a couple of centuries are excellently done ; but such inventions, although they would not have changed the primitive nature of man, would at all events have altered the opinions held by the Londoners of that day very considerably. But Ostrog, Lincoln, and the members of the Council think and argue precisely as members of the Fabian Society do at the present day. And the women, like all Mr. Wells's women, are appallingly sexual and hunger for babies.

Apparently, then, Mr. Wells does not wish to favour us by devoting particular attention to the human element in his characters. His two most ambitious attempts in this direction—Remington in *The New Machiavelli*, and "Uncle" Ponderevo in *Tono Bungay*—turn out in the end to be the ordinary, sloppy sentimentalists whom we can find in almost any modern novel we pick up.

If we examine into the sentimental side of Mr. Wells—he himself has given us a few particulars which will enable us to do so—we may perhaps be able to find out why we cannot call him precisely an artist. In the article in *T.P.'s Magazine* to which I have already

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referred, he mentions his family with all the irritating smugness of a self-made English manufacturer. He says :

I am just now forty-two years old, and I was born in that queer indefinite class that we call in England the middle class. I am not a bit aristocratic ; I do not know any of my ancestors beyond my grandparents, and about them I do not know very much, because I am the youngest son of my father and mother, and their parents were all dead before I was born. My mother was the daughter of an innkeeper at a place named Midhurst, who supplied post-horses to the coaches before the railways came ; my father was the son of the head-gardener of Lord de Lisle at Penshurst Castle, in Kent. They had various changes of fortune and position ; for most of his life my father kept a little shop in a suburb of London, and eked out his resources by playing a game called cricket, which is not only a pastime, but a show which people will pay to see, and which, therefore, affords a living for professional players. His shop was unsuccessful, and my mother, who had once been a lady's maid, became, when I was twelve years old, housekeeper in a large country house. I too was destined to be a shop-keeper. I left school at thirteen for that purpose. I was apprenticed first to a chemist, and, that proving unsatisfactory, to a draper. But after a year or so it became evident to me that the facilities for higher education that were and still are constantly increasing in England, offered me better chances in life than a shop and comparative illiteracy could do ; and so I struggled for and got various grants and scholarships that enabled me to study and to take a degree in science and some mediocre honours in the new and now great and growing University of London. . . .

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After I had graduated I taught biology for two or three years, and then became a journalist, partly because it is a more remunerative profession in England than teaching, but partly also because I had always taken the keenest interest in writing English. Some little kink in my mind has always made the writing of prose very interesting to me. I began first to write literary articles, criticism, and so forth, and presently short imaginative stories in which I made use of the teeming suggestions of modern science. There is a considerable demand for this sort of fiction in Great Britain and America, and my first book, *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, attracted considerable attention; and with two of its successors, *The War of the Worlds* and *The Invisible Man*, gave me a sufficient popularity to enable me to devote myself exclusively, and with a certain sense of security, to purely literary work.

It is not often that we find a literary man telling the truth about himself with such candour, and all of us will agree that Mr. Wells is to be congratulated upon his honesty. He seems proud of belonging to the middle class which, as he says quite correctly, is "indefinite," and he does not seem to care whether there were any men or women of culture among his ancestors or not. Then he found that there was an ordinary commercial "demand" for a certain class of scientific literature, and he did what he could to supply it, the result being popularity.

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Mr. Wells, unfortunately, has never quite shaken off the influence of this middle-class upbringing; he belongs emphatically to the intellectual bourgeoisie. His works are, like the middle class, rather "indefinite," and indeed he speaks of himself, in the article from which I quote, as an unsettled man. Like the middle classes in most countries, but more particularly in England, he appears to have a well-developed commercial mind—a factor which does not usually help a man to develop his artistic talents. In a previous book which I wrote on the subject of Tory democracy, I have endeavoured to analyse the psychology of the middle classes, and it is not worth while giving a further detailed account of it here. Briefly, it may be said that the commercial classes—who in England, of course, are almost entirely comprised within the middle classes—being materialists, seek almost unconsciously an idealistic philosophy or an idealistic religion as an antidote to, or as a brake upon, their everyday instincts. Wherever a people devotes its serious attention to trade—as in Germany, the United States, the British Colonies, and Great Britain herself—we shall always find that the middle classes predominate in

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that people, *i.e.* they control the politics of the State and "run" the State for the benefit of the trading classes rather than for the benefit of the working people or the landowners. The history of England since 1832, the history of the United States since the Civil War, and the history of Germany since 1871, will afford detailed illustrations of the truth of these remarks.

Now Mr. Wells, as he himself has told us, belongs to the middle class, and, as I have already said, he has never entirely shaken off its influence. When he thinks he is dealing with humanity he is almost invariably dealing with middle-class humanity, a class which in his novels includes all his prominent characters, from Remington, the alleged statesman, to Kipps, the draper's drudge. The middle classes being sentimental and idealistic, Mr. Wells is also sentimental and idealistic—especially in matters relating to love and sex. But the importance thus attributed to sex is likewise a feature of the middle-class intellect.

I need hardly say that the influences I have referred to may be traced just as much in their effects on Mr. Wells the social reformer as in their effects on Mr. Wells the novelist. I think he must have drifted towards the

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Fabian Society as the result of that magnetic bourgeois atmosphere which has always surrounded the various groups of Fabians, and Mr. Wells, if my memory serves me correctly, finally severed his connection with the Fabian Society because it was not quite middle-class enough for him. Some time after the 1906 election, it was proposed that the Fabians should more definitely ally themselves with the Labour Party in the House of Commons in order to carry on their propaganda. This proposal was resisted by many influential members of the Society on the perfectly just and reasonable ground that the Fabians were desirous of promoting the advancement of Socialism, whereas the Labour Party had shown a distinct inclination to ally themselves with the Liberals, thereby furthering the interests of the trading classes rather than of the workmen. That this view was the more correct one was sufficiently evidenced in 1911, when, both on the occasion of the London Dock strike and on the occasion of the railway strike later in the year, the working men were deliberately betrayed by the alleged representatives of labour in the House of Commons, who ably assisted the Government in bringing the disputes to a speedy

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termination, irrespective of the claims of the men. When the original proposal was made to ally the Fabians with the Labour Party, Mr. Shaw had the prescience to see that such a move would hinder the attainment of the purpose for which the Fabian Society was formed, and he therefore decided against it. Mr. Shaw was, and remains, much less of a middle-class man than Mr. Wells, who embraced this proposal with much enthusiasm. It was defeated, however, and Mr. Wells soon afterwards resigned his membership of the Fabian Society. I merely refer to this trifling incident to show that Mr. Wells, whether as social reformer, novelist, or thinker, has always remained susceptible to his early influences.

Mr. Wells's views on the ideal State can be gleaned from his sociological books, such as *First and Last Things*, *Anticipations*, *Mankind in the Making*, and *A Modern Utopia*; but so far as practical politics are concerned he has given an adequate explanation of his views in Volume II of *The New Age* (January 11, 1908): "The land," he says, "and all sorts of great common interests must be, if not owned, then at least controlled, managed, checked, redistributed by the State." He does not mind the



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common man owning something, but he must not own it individually; he must own it collectively. And of course he has said something in this article about the wrong sort of individuality, something which we might expect to find in the claptrap of Jeremy Bentham or the worst essays of J. S. Mill: "I aim at a growing collective life, a perpetual enhanced inheritance for our race through the fullest, freest development of the individual life." In other words, Mr. Wells here shows himself to be a supporter of the modern capitalistic State, so ably philosophised about by staunch Radicals like Mill and Lord Morley, as against the more human State that Burke had in mind. Time will make it clearer and clearer that the individualism advocated by Mr. Wells inevitably leads to the evils which he is so anxious to eradicate. If a State is founded on an individualistic basis it is understood that every one has individual freedom to exploit every one else, and it is this Liberal principle which has led to the great evil of capitalism in England, and all the other evils such as slums, overcrowded dwellings, and underpaid labour which inevitably arise under a capitalistic system. The true social reformer, of course, no longer holds that

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unlimited individual freedom is necessary or desirable. He insists, like the Catholic Church, upon a well-defined hierarchy and implicit obedience to leaders. One effect of hierarchy within a State, presuming that the philosophy of individualism were thrown over for the philosophy of leadership and subordination, would be the organisation of trades and crafts in the old form of guilds, the consequent raising of the status of the workman, and a considerable mitigation of the evils of poverty. The only one to suffer under such a system would be the over-wealthy capitalist, who, under the plan advocated so ably by Mr. Wells, would merely have additional opportunities of exploiting his workmen and adding to his gains.

In fairness to Mr. Wells, however, it must be said that he seems to have recognised his failure as a social reformer, and latterly he has devoted his mind less and less to purely sociological problems. In appearance, as he has himself told us, he is a man of diffident and ineffectual presence, easily bored by other than literary effort, so that, to use his own expression, he is not tempted to cut a figure in the world and abandon his work of observing and writing. We can clearly recognise, therefore, that a man

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of his disposition would not be likely to stand much chance at a committee meeting of the Fabian Society.

Mr. Wells, then, has no particular message to give to the world in his capacity of social reformer, and as a novelist a severe critic would not call him a great writer. Why then, it may be asked, did he obtain popularity with such comparative ease, and why is he so widely read? It is no doubt superfluous for me to reply that a writer need not necessarily be an artist to appeal to the crowd. Mr. Wells, indeed, has already told us the secret of his own success. He found that there was a demand for scientific stories of a particular type, and he supplied it. The result was naturally the popularity he sought. Indeed, if we consider Mr. Wells's novels from a non-artistic standpoint, there is a great deal to be said for them. The average reader does not know much about art, and he will never observe the lack of it in his books. Their scientific plots will attract him by the charm of novelty and, although I have compared Mr. Wells to Jules Verne, I have stated that his mind has a wider range. In *The New Machiavelli*, and in *The Sea Lady*, for example, we find occasional traces of a

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delicate gift of satire, and of this satire we find more than a mere trace in *The Wonderful Visit*. The Angel cannot become a gentleman, and Mr. Wells shows us how in quite a convincing fashion. Besides, the Englishman can always be "got at" on his sentimental side, and Mr. Wells knows how to appeal to him here. The love scenes in *Kipps* and *Tono Bungay* may be bad art, but the average library subscriber would doubtless pronounce them to be devilish good reading. George Ponderevo's wife, too, is a common type of woman who has seldom been so well described, and the little incident about the use of the name Ponderevo by Marion's firm after she married a second time shows what attention Mr. Wells pays to detail. Again the little, carefully-chosen pieces of mosaic, to which I have already referred, will find numerous admirers. What, for example, could be more excellent in its way than the description of the mate when he pronounces his opinion of the captain:

"That's what 'e is—a Dago!"

He nodded like a man who gives a last tap to a nail, and I could see he considered his remark well and truly laid. His face, though still resolute, became as tranquil and uneventful as a huge hall after a public meeting has dispersed out of it, and finally he closed and locked it with his pipe.

In truth, there are now two publics, the

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cultured public which can appreciate the work of an artist, a public which will instinctively pay attention to such things as form, style, technique, and judge the work accordingly. There is the other public, the rapidly growing middle-class public, the public which nearly all our modern writers appeal to. This public does not appreciate art and does not want art, but merely asks of a book, "Is it interesting?" And if the answer is in the affirmative the book sells. Mr. Wells was confronted with these two publics, and he made his choice.

As a man of observation, Mr. Wells could hardly help interesting himself for a time at any rate in problems of social reform. He could not fail to be struck with the evidences of poverty which present so ghastly a spectacle in every town in Great Britain, and we need therefore hardly be surprised to find that he joined the Fabian Society. Hearing modern problems of sociology and economics discussed, as he did, either by members of the Fabian Society or by non-members who had the Fabian type of mind, it is not remarkable that he allowed his scientific imagination to wander into the rather prosaic realms of statecraft, and to weave fancies regarding the organisation

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of ideal States. But here again, as I have pointed out, he has been greatly influenced by middle-classism. There is a startling footnote on page 163 of *Anticipations*, in which he refers to "my own culture and turn of mind, which is probably akin to that of a respectable mechanic of the year 2000." I speak of this little footnote as "startling," because so many of Mr. Wells's admirers insist on calling him an artist, and if there is any being who is at the diametrically opposite pole to an artist it is a mechanic, or any one with a mind interested in mechanics. There is not so much difference between the mind of the mechanic of 1900 and the mind of the mechanic of 1800, or for that matter of 1700. We might go back to Salomoneus, indeed, and still find the same type of mind. There seems no reason for supposing, therefore, that the mechanic of the year 2000 will have made any great advance in philosophy or anything else. I fear indeed that Mr. Wells can hardly believe in his own footnote—it sounds much too good to be true. But if he still holds by it, and by his remarks on supply and demand, allow me to submit to him an extract from Dr. Johnson's dictionary: "Mechanick, n.s. A manufacturer ; a low workman."

## CHAPTER VIII

GEORGE GISSING

WHEN we have long been accustomed to reading the works of men who have no particular conception of art, who consciously or unconsciously appeal to the largest possible public and entirely neglect the kindly influences of culture, it is with some relief that we turn to the writings of a man who was acquainted with art, and who held very definite notions, which he faithfully endeavoured to carry into practice, regarding form and technique, especially if such a man did not attempt to appeal to the general public, or even to a large section of it, but deliberately endured poverty in its worst form rather than yield to the solicitations of his friends and publishers to "write something" that would meet with a response from a wider circle. There were indeed very few such men among English authors of the latter part of the nineteenth century, but one of them, at any rate, was George Robert Gissing, whose

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career I hope no artist can contemplate without feelings of sympathy and respect, feelings which will nevertheless be tinged with no small proportion of that bleak despair which is so prominent a feature in Gissing's own life, and also in nearly every one of the characters he drew.

Not that Gissing lived in any very peculiar world. He was born in Wakefield in 1857, and drifted to London in his early twenties. At school he had read and studied incessantly, so much indeed as to undermine a constitution which does not appear at any time to have been particularly robust; nor did his early life in London tend to build up his health. It was not merely that he was a poor man; his life was rather almost that of a beggar. He lived in a garret when he was what he considered as fairly well off, and when money was less plentiful, he descended to the cheaper accommodation of the cellar. His furniture seldom consisted of more than a table, a chair, and a bed, but he invariably kept with him a shelf-full of Latin and Greek classics. He had all the true instincts of the classical scholar, and preferred old quarto editions, with ponderous Latin notes, to the smaller and more convenient modern



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reprints. "Even the best editions of our day have so much of the mere school-book," he complains in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*; "you feel so often that the man does not regard his author as literature, but simply as text. Pedant for pedant, the old is better than the new."

*Henry Ryecroft*, an autobiographical book if ever there was one, overflows with memories of Gissing's own poverty-stricken days in London, and at the same time indicates the temperament of the true scholar and lover of books. Like many another man before his time, and since, he often hesitated between buying a cheap lunch and a second-hand edition of some classic, and, as almost invariably happens in such cases, the intellectual fare came off victorious. Hear what Ryecroft, writing under the heading of "Spring," has to say about the purchase of one of Gissing's books:

Dozens of my books were purchased with money which ought to have been spent upon what are called the necessaries of life. Many a time I have stood before a stall, or a bookseller's window, torn by conflict of intellectual desire and bodily need. At the very hour of dinner, when my stomach clamoured for food, I have been stopped by sight of a volume so long coveted, and marked at so advantageous a price, that I could not let it go; yet to buy it meant pangs

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of famine. My *Heyne's Tibullus* was grasped at such a moment. It lay on the stall of the old book-shop in Goodge Street—a stall where now and then one found an excellent thing among quantities of rubbish. Sixpence was the price—sixpence! At that time I used to eat my midday meal (of course my dinner) at a coffee-shop in Oxford Street, one of the real old coffee shops, such as now, I suppose, can hardly be found. Sixpence was all I had—yes, all I had in the world; it would purchase a plate of meat and vegetables. But I did not dare to hope that the *Tibullus* would wait until the morrow, when a certain small sum fell due to me. I paced the pavement, fingering the coppers in my pocket, eyeing the stall, two appetites at combat within me. The book was bought and I went home with it, and as I made a dinner of bread and butter I gloated over the pages.

This was Gissing's temperament through and through, the temperament of the scholar cast on evil days and sad surroundings. It is likewise the main theme of many of Gissing's books—it was, in fact, the one great theme which he always had in mind when he wrote. Seldom indeed did he write a book without including among the characters some artistic scholar, living, working, struggling for an existence in some uncongenial environment. Kingscote in *Isabel Clarendon*, Reardon in *New Grub Street*, and Henry Ryecroft himself are all types of the Gissing scholar. Many more could be mentioned, and their names will readily occur

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to any lover of Gissing. There is, for example, Alfred Yule, an epigone who should have been born in the eighteenth century, and there is again yet another distinct type in Biffin. The discerning reader, I think, will find that Gissing is represented in them all. For many years of his life in London he was compelled to live as Biffin lived—endeavouring to eke out a very modest and limited livelihood by teaching the aspiring sons of working men the elements of culture, giving his attention between times, with all the love of an artist, to the novel he was trying to complete and to make as perfect as possible, recreating himself now and again as best he might with a dip into one of his old quarto classics, at times simply reading the lines aloud to himself or occasionally to some friend in equally reduced circumstances who happened to share his tastes.

I have said that Gissing's main theme is the life of a man of culture spent amid uncongenial surroundings. It was a theme about which Gissing could always write with energy, though often with the energy of desperation. He was himself a thorough artist, and his wide reading in the classics and modern English and Continental authors had confirmed him in his

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scholarly pursuits and rendered him absolutely unfitted to take any part in a commercial existence. On the whole, he seems to have fared well at the hands of his publishers, who probably acted as well as they were able towards a writer whose "output"—to use a hideous commercial expression in which modern artists seem to delight—was relatively small. In 1880 Gissing published his first book, *Workers in the Dawn*, which was not followed by *The Unclassed* until 1884. One of his most powerful novels, *Isabel Clarendon*, followed in 1886, and in the same year appeared *Demos*. This latter book brought Gissing's name before a rather wider public than his previous works had appealed to ; but it was a book which he himself disliked. He had experimented in it to see what he could do in the way of a melodramatic tale, and the result, though pleasing to the public, was far from satisfactory to the author, who put his art before everything. It brought him, however, the sum of fifty pounds down, and this money enabled him to carry out the desire which he had long tried to gratify. Husbanding his resources as best he could, he made straight for Italy, and so well did he economise that he was able to visit Athens before returning

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to the smoke and fogs of London and the lower-middle-class environment which he detested with a peculiar loathing. The memory of this first visit to what he justly regarded as one of the few lands of culture remaining in Europe never left him. We see the influence of it in some passages in *New Grub Street*, just as the same passages expose to us one of Gissing's very few defects. When Reardon has sunk as low as he can in the intellectual scale, when he has definitely decided to abandon creative work altogether, and to take up a very much underpaid hospital clerkship, he falls in with Biffin. It is characteristic that at this meeting, when their fortunes were at their nadir, Gissing should have made the worthy couple discuss, not the means of raising money, not even Reardon's domestic calamities, but the fragments of Euripides. After a word or two, then, about his wife, Amy, Reardon breaks out again :

“ The best moments of life are those when we contemplate beauty in the purely artistic spirit—objectively. I have had such moments in Greece and Italy ; times when I was a free spirit, utterly remote from the temptations and harassings of sexual emotion. What we call love is mere turmoil. Who wouldn't release himself from it for ever, if the possibility offered ? ”

“ Oh, there's a good deal to be said for that, of course. ”

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Reardon's face was illumined with the glow of an exquisite memory.

"Haven't I told you," he said, "of that marvellous sunset at Athens? I was on the Pnyx; had been rambling about there the whole afternoon. For I daresay a couple of hours I had noticed a growing rift of light in the clouds to the west; it looked as if the dull day might have a rich ending. That rift grew broader and brighter—the only bit of light in the sky. On Parnes there were white strips of ragged mist, hanging very low; the same on Hymettus, and even the peak of Lycabettus was just hidden. Of a sudden, the sun's rays broke out. They showed themselves first in a strangely beautiful way, striking from behind the seaward hills through the pass that leads to Eleusis, and so gleaming on the nearer slopes of Aigaleos, making the clefts black and the rounded parts of the mountain wonderfully brilliant with golden colour. All the rest of the landscape, remember, was untouched with a ray of light. This lasted only a minute or two, then the sun itself sank into the open patch of sky and shot glory in every direction; broadening beams smote upwards over the dark clouds, and made them a lurid yellow. To the left of the sun, the Gulf of Ægina was all golden mist, the islands floating in it vaguely. To the right, over black Salamis, lay delicate strips of pale blue—indescribably pale and delicate."

"You remember it very clearly."

"As if I saw it now! But wait. I turned eastward, and there to my astonishment was a magnificent rainbow, a perfect semi-circle, stretching from the foot of Parnes to that of Hymettus, framing Athens and its hills, which grew brighter and brighter—the brightness for which there is no name among colours. Hymettus was of a soft misty warmth, a something tending to purple, its ridges marked by exquisitely

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soft and indefinite shadows, the rainbow coming right down in front. The Acropolis simply glowed and blazed. As the sun descended all these colours grew richer and warmer; for a moment the landscape was nearly crimson. Then suddenly the sun passed into the lower stratum of cloud, and the splendour died almost at once, except that there remained the northern half of the rainbow, which had become double. In the west, the clouds were still glorious for a time; there were two shaped like great expanded wings, edged with refulgence."

This is undoubtedly one of Gissing's best descriptive passages, and the sudden contrast when we once more find ourselves back in the London slums is very striking.

The weakness of Gissing I have mentioned lies, as may be guessed, in his belittling of the sexual instinct. The effects of sex on culture have been apparent from the remotest ages, and Nietzsche was right in emphasising them as he did in his various books. We may understand Gissing's temperament in this respect when we consider the existence he led. His delicate constitution was weakened by starvation in London, and the women whom he met were doubtless not particularly attractive. We know how little attractive they were, indeed, when we consider how remorselessly he has depicted so many types of them—the rather

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harsh and selfish Amy Reardon, Maud and Dora Milvain, Mrs. Alfred Yule, and Amy's mother in *New Grub Street*; the Misses Madden, Miss Barfoot, and Mrs. Luke in *The Odd Women*; Amy Hewett and Mrs. Peckover in *The Nether World*; Miss Waghorn in *The Town Traveller*; Mrs. Peak in *Born in Exile*; and numerous other instances which could easily be adduced. When dealing with men and women of the lower middle class, indeed, Gissing is entirely in his element, and he has, in my opinion, failed in his very few books, like *Our Friend the Charlatan*, where he takes himself and his reader into the upper strata of society.

Of Gissing more perhaps than of any other man of equal sensibility can we say that the iron entered his soul. In one of his autobiographical novels, viz., *Born in Exile*, the wants and longings of the hero, Godfrey Peak, are the wants and longings of George Gissing, and few of them indeed was he able to secure. Young Peak wishes to travel, to frequent the society of pretty women, to belong to a good club, to be able to go to Paris and be enchanted in the Comédie Française, or to go to Vienna and be equally enchanted in



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the Court Opera. Added to this, of course, he has the customary tastes of a scholar and would like to be able to lead at times a quiet comfortable existence, surrounded by piles of well-bound classical authors. Instead of this, like Gissing himself, we find him in obscure London lodgings with *Homer* and *Shakespeare* and two or three other books huddled up on a small deal table, surrounded, to quote a passage in the book, "by lying, slandering, quarrelling, by drunkenness, by brutal vice, by all abominations that distinguish the lodging-letter of the metropolis." In the most powerful novel Gissing ever wrote, *New Grub Street*, there are many similar passages. It was the very atmosphere amid which he was compelled to live that led him to attach what many of his readers and critics will doubtless consider as exaggerated importance to the external appearances of refinement—a well-cut overcoat, boots that did not leak, a collar which was not falling to pieces, and an occasional clean shirt. No wonder Mr. Thomas Seccombe, in his introduction to *The House of Cobwebs*, emphasised the importance of Gissing's having described a certain heroine as exhibiting in her countenance "habitual nourishment on good and

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plenteous food." The full force of this poignant passage, I may be allowed to add, lies in that word "habitual." Gissing himself occasionally got good food, but it was seldom plenteous, and until late in his short life it was certainly never habitual.

After some experience of this life in London, Gissing managed to save enough money to take him to the United States. Here he thought he could do better by private teaching, but luck was once more against him, and we soon find him back in London. When Whelpdale in *New Grub Street* mentions casually that he lived for some days on pea-nuts, it may be definitely assumed that the incident is no mere creation of the author's fancy. A far cry this from his ideals as expressed through the mouth of Joseph Milvain in the same book :

My aim is to have easy command of all the pleasures desired by a cultivated man. I want to live among beautiful things, and never to be troubled by a thought of vulgar difficulties. I want to travel and enrich my mind in foreign countries. I want to associate on equal terms with refined and interesting people. I want to be known, to be familiarly referred to, to feel when I enter a room that people regard me with some curiosity. . . . My instincts are strongly social, yet I can't be at my ease in society, simply because I can't do justice to myself. Want of

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money makes me the inferior of the people I talk with, though I might be superior to them in most things. I am ignorant in many ways, and merely because I am poor. Imagine my never having been out of England! It shames me when people talk familiarly of the Continent. So with regard to all manner of amusements and pursuits at home. Impossible for me to appear among my acquaintances at the theatre, at concerts. I am perpetually at a disadvantage; I haven't fair play. Suppose me possessed of money enough to live a full and active life for the next five years; why, at the end of that time my position would be secure. To him that hath shall be given—you know how universally true that is.

Gissing has acknowledged over and over again that his great master in the novel was Dickens; but Dickens, who had no regard for form and never attempted to write a work of art in his life, did not exercise any inimical influence on Gissing from a cultural point of view. One characteristic of Dickens is that he brings his characters to a happy ending as a rule: or when he does not their fate, as in the case of the unfortunate Nancy or little Nell, is at least surrounded with some pathos. Far different is the case with Gissing's characters. A happy ending with him is quite the exception, and where he does give us a happy ending, as in the case of *Demos*, we see only too obviously that it is forced, artificial, and in opposition to

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the instinct of the author. Dickens loved all his characters, even the lowest ; there is something good-humoured or at all events attractive about such people as Sam Weller, Bumble, and even the Artful Dodger and Charlie Bates. Gissing, on the other hand, loathed the people among whom he lived and whom he described with such vividness. One remark of Biffin's about "conventionalism" is merely very slightly exaggerated Gissing, "No, no, let us copy life. When the man and woman are to meet for a great scene of passion, let it all be frustrated by one or other of them having a bad cold in the head, and so on. Let the pretty girl get a disfiguring pimple on her nose just before the ball at which she is going to shine. Show the numberless repulsive features of common decent life. Seriously, coldly ; not a hint of facetiousness, or the thing becomes different." Gissing had the quick eye, the instinctive knowledge of the artist for every one of the people by whom he was surrounded. As a scholar of a retiring disposition he detested them, as a man of insight he understood them, and as a man of superior intelligence he despised them utterly. He was sufficiently Christian, or at all events he had sufficient religious

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sense about him, to guess that some form of religion practically applied might go far towards alleviating such misery. He poured scorn upon the mere atheist, upon men like Tom the gardener in *Our Friend the Charlatan*, who in private calls himself "a hagnostic." And in this book, too, there is a characteristic Gissing tirade about Christianity. Dyce Lashmar is speaking to his father, the vicar :

"Can you maintain," asked Dyce respectfully, "that Christianity is still a civilising power?"

"To all appearances," was the grave answer, "Christianity has failed—utterly, absolutely, glaringly failed. At this moment the world, I am convinced, holds more potential barbarism than did the Roman Empire under the Antonines. Wherever I look, I see a monstrous contrast between the professions and the practice, between the assumed and the actual aims, of so-called Christian peoples. Christianity has failed to conquer the human heart."

"It must be very dreadful for you to be convinced of that."

"It is. But more dreadful would be a loss of belief in the Christian spirit. By belief, I don't mean faith in its ultimate triumph; I am not at all sure that I can look forward to that. No; but a persuasion that the Sermon on the Mount is good—is the best. Once upon a time, multitudes were in that sense Christian. Nowadays, does one man in a thousand give his mind's allegiance (lips and life disregarded) to that ideal of human thought and conduct? Take your newspaper writer, who speaks to and for the

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million ; he simply scorns every Christian precept. How can he but scorn a thing so unpractical ? Nay, I notice that he is already throwing off the hypocrisy hitherto thought decent. I read newspaper articles which sneer and scoff at those who venture to remind the world that, after all, it is nominally in the service of a Christian ideal. Our prophets begin openly to proclaim that self-interest and the hardest materialism are our only safe guides. Now and then such passages amaze, appal me—but I am getting used to them. So I am to the same kind of declaration in every-day talk. Men in most respectable coats, sitting at most orderly tables, hold the language of pure barbarism. If you drew one of them aside, and said to him, ‘ But what about the fruits of the Spirit ? ’—what sort of look would he give you ? ”

“ I agree entirely,” exclaimed Dyce. “ And for that very reason I want to work for a new civilising principle.”

“ If you get into the House, shall you talk there about bio-sociology ? ”

“ Why, no,” answered Dyce, with a chuckle. “ If I were capable of that, I should have very little chance of getting into the House at all, or of doing anything useful anywhere.”

“ In other words,” said his father, still eyeing an unlit pipe, “ one must be practical—eh, Dyce ? ”

“ In the right way.”

“ Yes, yes ; one must be practical, practical. If you know which is the right way, I am very glad—I congratulate you. For my own part, I seek it vainly ; I seek it these forty years and more ; and it grows clear to me that I should have done much better not to heed that question at all. ‘ Blessed are the merciful—blessed are the pure in heart—blessed are the peacemakers.’ It is strikingly unpractical, Dyce, my boy ; you can’t, again in to-day’s sweet language,

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'run' the world on those principles. They are utterly incompatible with business ; and business is life."

There is a very suitable commentary on this in *Henry Ryecroft*: "Principles always become a matter of vehement discussion when practice is at an ebb."

As a scholar Gissing naturally looked with contempt on politics and political parties, but still, from at least one of his books, it is possible to gain an outline of his views on democracy.

I take the passage from *Henry Ryecroft*, Section XVI of "Spring":

I am no friend of the people. As a force, by which the tenor of the time is conditioned, they inspire me with distrust, with fear ; as a visible multitude, they make me shrink aloof, and often move me to abhorrence. For the greater part of my life, the people signified to me the London crowd, and no phrase of temperate meaning would utter my thoughts of them under that aspect. The people as countryfolk are little known to me ; such glimpses as I have had of them do not invite to nearer acquaintance. Every instinct of my being is anti-democratic, and I dread to think of what our England may become when Demos rules irresistibly.

Right or wrong, this is my temper. But he who should argue from it that I am intolerant of all persons belonging to a lower social rank than my own would go far astray. Nothing is more rooted in my mind than the vast distinction between the individual and the class. Take a man by himself, and there is gener-

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ally some reason to be found in him, some disposition for good; mass him with his fellows in the social organism, and ten to one he becomes a blatant creature, without a thought of his own, ready for any evil to which contagion prompts him. It is because nations tend to stupidity and baseness that mankind moves so slowly; it is because individuals have a capacity for better things that it moves at all.

In my youth, looking at this man and that, I marvelled that humanity had made so little progress. Now, looking at men in the multitude, I marvel that they have advanced so far.

I have quoted largely from Gissing chiefly because I think I have been able to find passages which are interesting as showing Gissing's character even when detached from their context. It is worth noting that the artist in him enabled the unfortunate novelist to see through the democratic spirit of modern science, and to observe what a check it is likely to prove on the progress of art and culture. Take this extract from *Henry Ryecroft*, who was supposed to be writing, appositely enough, under the heading of "Winter":

Somebody has been making a speech, reported at a couple of columns' length in the paper. As I glance down the waste of print, one word catches my eye again and again. It's all about "science" and therefore doesn't concern me.

I wonder whether there are many men who have the same feeling with regard to "science" as I have?



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It is something more than a prejudice ; often it takes the form of a dread, almost a terror. Even those branches of science which are concerned with things that interest me—which deal with plants and animals and the heaven of stars—even these I cannot contemplate without uneasiness, a spiritual disaffection ; new discoveries, new theories, however they engage my intelligence, soon weary me, and in some way depress. When it comes to other kinds of science—the sciences blatant and ubiquitous—the science by which men become millionaires—I am possessed with an angry hostility, a resentful apprehension. This was born in me, no doubt ; I cannot trace it to circumstances of my life, or to any particular moment of my mental growth. My boyish delight in Carlyle doubtless nourished the temper, but did not Carlyle so delight me because of what was already in my mind ? I remember, as a lad, looking at complicated machinery with a shrinking uneasiness which, of course, I did not understand ; I remember the sort of disturbed contemptuousness with which, in my time of “ examinations,” I dismissed “ science papers.” It is intelligible enough to me, now, that unformed fear ; the ground of my antipathy has grown clear enough. I hate and fear “ science,” because of my conviction that, for long to come if not for ever, it will be the remorseless enemy of mankind. I see it destroying all simplicity and gentleness of life, all the beauty of the world ; I see it restoring barbarism under a mask of civilisation ; I see it darkening men’s minds and hardening their hearts ; I see it bringing a time of vast conflicts, which will pale into insignificance “ the thousands wars of old,” and, as likely as not, will whelm all the laborious advances of mankind in blood-drenched chaos.

We cannot say with truth that Gissing’s

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fortunes really improved until after the publication of *New Grub Street* in 1891; but this must not be taken to mean that thenceforward he began making sums such as are now generally ascribed to a circulation-novelist like Mr. Wells. In the later nineties Gissing made perhaps £300 a year—a poor recompense indeed after years of misery, semi-starvation, and ill-treatment. From 1900 until he died in December 1903, at the early age of forty-six, he spent most of his time abroad. His death, indeed, took place at St. Jean de Luz. Before he died, however, he was enabled to make one more journey to Italy. On this occasion he penetrated much further south and into Sicily, the record of the voyage being preserved in one of the very best books of such impressions that we have in the English language, *By the Ionian Sea*. Here the reader will find so many excellent descriptive passages that it is difficult to select one or two for quotation, but I cannot resist giving this vignette of the ploughman on the outskirts of Taranto :

Later in the day I came across a figure scarcely less impressive. Beyond the new quarter of the town, on the ragged edge of its wide, half-peopled streets, lies a tract of olive orchards and of seed-land; there, alone amid great bare fields, a countryman was ploughing.

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The wooden plough, as regards its form, might have been thousands of years old ; it was drawn by a little donkey, and traced in the soil—the generous southern soil—the merest scratch of a furrow. I could not but approach the man and exchange words with him ; his rude but gentle face, his gnarled hands, his rough and scanty vesture, moved me to a deep respect, and when his speech fell upon my ear, it was as though I listened to one of the ancestors of our kind. Stopping in his work, he answered my inquiries with careful civility ; certain phrases escaped me, but on the whole he made himself quite intelligible, and was glad, I could see, when my words proved that I understood him. I drew apart, and watched him again. Never have I seen man so utterly patient, so primævally deliberate. The donkey's method of ploughing was to pull for one minute, and then rest for two ; it excited in the ploughman not the least surprise or resentment. Though he held a long stick in his hand, he never made use of it ; at each stoppage he contemplated the ass, and then gave utterance to a long " Ah-h-h ! " in a note of the most affectionate remonstrance. They were not driver and beast, but comrades in labour. It reposed the mind to look upon them.

Again, when Gissing caught fever at Cotrone, he was attended to in the little inn, and a few of the scenes he described are laughable enough :

Whilst my fever was high, little groups of people often came into the room, to stand and stare at me, exchanging, in a low voice, remarks which they supposed I did not hear, or, hearing, could not understand ; as a matter of fact, their dialect was now intelligible enough to me, and I knew that they dis-

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cussed my chances of surviving. Their natures were not sanguine. As a result, doubtless, of the unhealthy climate, every one at Cotrone seemed in a more or less gloomy state of mind. The hostess went about uttering ceaseless moans and groans ; when she was in my room I heard her constantly sighing, " Ah, Signore ! Ah, Cristo ! " exclamations which, perhaps, had some reference to my illness, but which did not cease when I recovered. Whether she had any private reason for depression I could not learn ; I fancy not ; it was only the whimpering and querulous habit due to low health. A female servant, who occasionally brought me food (I found that she also cooked it), bore herself in much the same way. This domestic was the most primitive figure of the household. Picture a woman of middle-age, wrapped at all times in dirty rags (not to be called clothing), obese, grimy, with dishevelled black hair, and hands so scarred, so deformed by labour and neglect, as to be scarcely human. She had the darkest and fiercest eyes I ever saw. Between her and her mistress went on an unceasing quarrel : they quarrelled in my room, in the corridor, and, as I knew by their shrill voices, in places remote ; yet I am sure they did not dislike each other, and probably neither of them ever thought of parting. Unexpectedly, one evening, this woman entered, stood by the bedside, and began to talk with such fierce energy, with such flashing of her black eyes, and such distortion of her features, that I could only suppose that she was attacking me for the trouble I caused her. A minute or two passed before I could even hit the drift of her furious speech ; she was always the most difficult of the natives to understand, and in rage she became quite unintelligible. Little by little, by dint of questioning, I got at what she meant. There had been *guai*, worse than usual ; the mistress had reviled her unendurably

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for some fault or other, and was it not hard that she should be used like this after having *tanto, tanto lavorato!* In fact, she was appealing for my sympathy, not abusing me at all. When she went on to say that she was alone in the world, that all her kith and kin were *freddi morti* (stone dead), a pathos in her aspect and her words took hold upon me; it was much as if some heavy-laden beast of burden had suddenly found tongue, and protested in the rude beginnings of articulate utterance against its hard lot. If only one could have learnt, in intimate detail, the life of this domestic serf! How interesting, and how sordidly picturesque against the background of romantic landscape, of scenic history! I looked long into her sallow, wrinkled face, trying to imagine the thoughts that ruled its expression. In some measure my efforts at kindly speech succeeded, and her "Ah, Cristo!" as she turned to go away, was not without a touch of solace.

Another time my hostess fell foul of the waiter, because he had brought me goat's milk which was very sour. There ensued the most comical scene. In an access of fury the stout woman raged and stormed; the waiter, a lank young fellow, with a simple, good-natured face, after trying to explain that he had committed the fault by inadvertence, suddenly raised his hand like one about to exhort a congregation, and exclaimed in a tone of injured remonstrance, "Un po' di calma! Un po' di calma!" My explosion of laughter at this inimitable utterance put an end to the strife. The youth laughed with me; his mistress bustled him out of the room, and then began to inform me that he was weak in his head. Ah! she exclaimed, her life with these people! what it cost her to keep them in anything like order! When she retired, I heard her expectorating violently in the corridor; a habit with every inmate of this genial hostelry.

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It is without hesitation then that I call Gissing an artist, and I have not thought it necessary or even desirable to deal with any one of his books in full to prove the statement. The quotations I have given will, I think, indicate his soundness of scholarship, and the remarkable effect it had on his style. We do not see in him, as we do in so many other modern novelists, any signs of that laboriousness which distinguishes the self-made artist from the real artist. A long classical training, undertaken and carried through out of pure love for the great works of antiquity, enabled Gissing at once to seize upon the right word, the right phrase; enabled him likewise to adjust the part to the whole and to make every one of his books a complete unity. As a man he himself was not discordant; like Horace, an author whom he loved, he was acquainted to a nicety with his own limits, and, like Horace again, he seldom indeed went beyond them. He knew his characters, he knew his subject, and he weaved just a sufficient amount of plot to keep the reader interested without entangling him in a labyrinth. He deals with the seamiest side of realism without being too realistic. The worst argument that can be brought against

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his books is that his subjects are depressing, and depressing they undoubtedly are ; but his books are art for all that, and as such they help us to live. They are only depressing in the sense in which we speak of the Book of Job as depressing, or Dante, or Macbeth, and to no greater extent than any of these. As for the numerous beautiful sketches, vignettes, or descriptions scattered through his novels they may be sufficiently judged perhaps from the quotations I have already given ; but I feel that, in justice to Gissing, I ought to give one more. Take the following from *Thyrza* :

Do you know that music of the obscure ways, to which children dance ? Not if you have only heard it ground to your ears' affliction beneath your windows in the square. To hear it aright you must stand in the darkness of such a by-street as this, and for the moment be at one with those who dwell around, in the blear-eyed houses, in the dim burrows of poverty, in the unmapped haunts of the semi-human. Then you will know the significance of that vulgar clanging of melody ; a pathos of which you did not dream will touch you, and therein the secret of hidden London will be half-revealed. The life of men who toil without hope, yet with the hunger of an unshaped desire ; of women in whom the sweetness of their sex is perishing under labour and misery ; the laugh, the song of the girl who strives to enjoy her year or two of youthful vigour, knowing the darkness of the years to come ; the careless defiance of the youth who feels

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his blood and revolts against the lot which would tame it ; all that is purely human in these darkened multitudes speaks to you as you listen. It is the half-conscious striving of a nature which knows not what it would attain, which deforms a true thought by gross expression, which clutches at the beautiful and soils it with foul hands. The children were dirty and ragged, several of them bare-footed, nearly all bare-headed, but they danced with noisy merriment. One there was, a little girl, on crutches ; incapable of taking a partner, she stumped round and round, circling upon the pavement, till giddiness came upon her and she had to fall back and lean against the wall, laughing aloud at her weakness. Gilbert stepped up to her, and put a penny into her hand ; then, before she had recovered from her surprise, passed onwards.

It is in passages like these where Gissing surpasses even Crackanthorpe, and is worthy to rank with Guy de Maupassant. Once more, before closing this all too short survey of Gissing, let me insist upon that characteristic which I have already ascribed to him as an honour—he never sought to degrade his art for the sake of money. Confronted with the two publics, he chose the smaller ; and for doing this he will one day meet with his reward.



## CHAPTER IX

W. B. YEATS—GEORGE MOORE—THE CELTIC REVIVAL—FIONA MACLEOD—"A. E."—JOHN DAVIDSON—FRANCIS THOMPSON—W. L. COURTNEY—LAURENCE BINYON—ST. JOHN HANKIN—RICHARD LE GALLIENNE—R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM.

As I have attempted in this volume to deal with the dynamic movement in English literature during the last generation, I have not thought it necessary to treat of men like William Watson, Alfred Austin, or Rudyard Kipling. Mr. Austin is the direct poetical descendant of Tennyson, mixed here and there with a spice of Browning, and his work continues in their tradition. Mr. Watson is a poet of considerable merit, but his work as a whole does not swerve sufficiently far from the orthodox to merit either considerable praise or considerable blame. Mr. Kipling is, it is true, of much more importance than either, but he will, I think, be remembered in English literature as a

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short-story writer rather than as a poet. Despite the verve and swing of his verse, particularly as exhibited in *Barrack Room Ballads*, it will not, I think, last so long as his prose. To use a convenient German word, it is *zeitgemäss*; that is to say, adapted to, or harmonising with, one particular period of time. Patriotism alone is not sufficient excuse for a poem, and unfortunately most of Mr. Kipling's poetical work is not distinguished by the imagination we can find in men like Ernest Dowson, Arthur Symons, or John Davidson. His longer novels, too, have a tendency to lag here and there; but as a short-story writer we need have no hesitation in comparing him with the best Russian or French masters.

In Mr. William Butler Yeats, however, we have a man of a very different stamp of mind. Mr. Yeats was born in Dublin in 1865. It was, I think, Oscar Wilde who was one of the first to appreciate his merits as a poet and to invite him to London. There were certain literary circles at that time where a vague interest was exhibited in what has come to be known as the Celtic movement. It was a somewhat sluggish and indeed almost stagnant movement, with no particular aim in view, but when Mr. Yeats came

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to London in 1888 and published his first volume of poems, *The Wanderings of Oisín*, in 1889, it became more active. Mr. Yeats has since rewritten a great part of this early volume, but there can be no doubt that its publication opened up quite a new world to those English poets and men of letters who took any interest in such things. Gaelic mythology and the shadowy chieftains who move vaguely through the records of ancient Irish history had long been neglected, and in England their study had been confined to a few professors. Mr. Yeats showed how Gaelic mythology could be turned to advantage by modern poetry, and his enthusiasm, which was shared by countrymen and countrywomen of his such as George Moore, Dr. Douglas Hyde, and Lady Gregory, finally resulted in the founding of the Irish Literary Theatre, an institution which provided an outlet for plays by Mr. Yeats himself as well as others by writers like George Moore and J. M. Synge.

In 1892 Mr. Yeats published his *Countess Cathleen* and other verses. A volume of sketches entitled *The Celtic Twilight* followed in 1893, and *The Secret Rose*, containing the stories of Hanrahan the Red, appeared in 1897.

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In 1895 Mr. Yeats issued a revised edition of his poems, which he followed up in 1899 with a remarkable volume of lyrics entitled *The Wind among the Reeds*. From the beginning of the present century he has been closely connected with the Irish Literary Theatre, for which he has written several plays. One of his dramas, *Diarmuid and Grania*, written in collaboration with Mr. George Moore, was produced in London by Mr. F. R. Benson in 1901, and we have since had his collected essays, his *Ideas of Good and Evil*, and one or two other books of minor importance. Although Mr. Yeats is still a young man, therefore, he has given us a sufficient amount of work to enable us to estimate his place among the writers of the present day.

It must be said that Mr. Yeats's standing in modern English literature is high, but not perhaps for the reasons usually supposed. Mr. Yeats has revived our interest in Celtic mythology, but he has not, as he evidently thought, found in it his own inspiration. If a political parallel may be allowed in this connection, I may be permitted to point out that a cry like "back to the land" or "back to feudalism" brings to our minds an aim which it is

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no longer possible to carry out in view of the great industrial progress attained by every country throughout the world in the course of the last hundred years. A system of land reform is possible, and a modified type of feudalism is also a practicable suggestion, but some modifications in the old systems are essential. Similarly, although Mr. Yeats and other writers have endeavoured to seek their inspiration in Celtic mythology, they could not shake off the influence exercised upon them not only by the English literature with which they became familiar, but also by the entire literary atmosphere of the period, whether in Ireland or in England. For us it is as impossible at the present day to go back to Celtic mythology with undiluted minds as it is to endeavour to write poems on a basis of Roman or Greek mythology, as if we had been born in the first or second century of our era. Between Mr. Yeats and Celtic mythology there lies the whole range of English literature, with which he is obviously familiar. If he had been caught young, so to speak, by some modern druid and brought up all his life on the poems of the ancient bards, he might possibly have been able to write something

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inspired by purely Celtic feelings. Mr. Yeats has found numerous characters in ancient Gaelic literature, numerous poetical suggestions, and no doubt the interpretation of innumerable moods; but he did not go to this mythology with what I should be inclined to call an undiluted mind. He sought his characters in old Gaelic literature, but his inspiration came from William Blake.

Mr. Yeats's natural tendencies were towards the mystical, one might even say towards the unreal. These, of course, are entitled to be called poetic qualities, and they are in particular the characteristics of primitive peoples. They are not qualities peculiar to ancient Gaelic poetry; they are qualities common to the poetry of every nation. In ordinary circumstances I should wish to lay no particular stress on this fact, and I do so here merely because the modern Irish school has led many people to believe that mysticism, symbolism, the vague, and the unreal are essential qualities in Gaelic poetry and peculiar to it alone. In his first essay, in *The Ideas of Good and Evil*, Mr. Yeats is frank enough to tell us that his poetical choice was deliberate: "I wanted to write popular poetry like those Irish poets, for

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I believed that all good literatures were popular, and even cherished the fancy that the Adelphi melodramas, which I had never seen, might be good literature, and I hated what I called 'the coteries.' I thought that one must write without care, for that was of 'the coteries,' but with a gusty energy that would put all straight if it came out of the right heart. . . . From that day to this I have been busy among the verses and stories that the people make for themselves, but I had been busy a very little while before I knew that what we call popular poetry never came from the people at all."

Mr. Yeats, of course, was not alone in imagining that good poetry could spring from the people, and he was not the first to admit his error. Nietzsche recounts a precisely similar experience: in his late teens and even in his early twenties he was under the impression that a noble poem could arise from among the masses, and he thought he discerned in the poems ascribed to Homer some grounds for holding this belief—a belief which, as the result of the rather uninspired investigations of Wolf and his followers, had become very prevalent in Germany during the first half of the nineteenth century. A few years later, however,

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when Nietzsche began to investigate the matter on his own account, he saw clearly enough that no amount of combination on the part of a body of uninspired people could equal the efforts of one real poet. In the strict sense of the words, the expression "popular poetry" is a contradiction in terms. Masters of verse like Mr. Yeats may write in ballad form if they choose; the result will probably be poetry, but it will not necessarily be popular. The following specimen of Mr. Yeats's work from *The Wind among the Reeds* is, I think, sufficiently ballad-like to please the crowd and sufficiently poetical to please the critic :

### THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS

I went out to the hazel wood,  
Because a fire was in my head,  
And cut and pulled a hazel wand,  
And hooked a berry to a thread ;  
And when white moths were on the wing,  
And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
I dropped the berry in a stream  
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor  
I went to blow the fire a-flame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And some one called me by my name ;  
It had become a glimmering girl  
With apple blossom in her hair  
Who called me by my name and ran  
And faded through the brightening air.



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Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands ;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

This is, I think, a very good specimen of Mr. Yeats's work—it exhibits him, that is to say, as a compound of Gaelic bard and William Blake. Another side of the poet, however, and one in which Blake's influence is less evident, may be found even more interesting. Many of us who have read through *The Rose* and come across the beautiful lyric *When you are old*, will doubtless be reminded of Mr. Arthur Symons :

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep ;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true ;  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars  
Murmur, a little sad, *From us fled Love ;*  
*He paced upon the mountains far above,*  
*And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.*

If we go back to *The Wind among the Reeds*

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again, we shall find a lyric entitled *The Heart of the Woman*, which possesses quite a peculiar pathos. It may remind others, as it reminded me, of the Provençal poets, or their Spanish equivalents the Trovadores. Mr. Yeats has shed what Pater would call a gem-like flame upon a mood, though the same thought, if expressed by a man like Góngora, would have been stiffened, polished, and ornamented beyond recognition.

Oh, what to me the little room  
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest ;  
He bade me out into the gloom,  
And my breast lies upon his breast.

Oh, what to me my mother's care,  
The house where I was safe and warm ;  
The shadowy blossom in my hair  
Will hide us from the bitter storm.

Oh hiding hair and dewy eyes,  
I am no more with life and death,  
My heart upon his warm heart lies,  
My breath is mixed into his breath.

As a playwright, Mr. Yeats, I confess, does not appeal to me. The stage does not seem to me the place for Mr. Shaw's sociological problems, but it seems to me even less the place for mysticism and symbolism, and these are qualities which are to be found in all Mr. Yeats's dramas. There are, of course, many

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fine passages and fine single lines to be met with here and there, and they are not merely stuck on for the sake of effect: when they come into our memory after we have read the play they bring with them their proper context. *The Wanderings of Oisín*, too, is rich in noble phraseology. Let me take a passage from Book II—not that it is the best, but because it is short:

But the love-dew dims our eyes till the day  
When God shall come from the sea with a sigh  
And bid the stars drop down from the sky,  
And the moon like a pale rose wither away.

And of course we cannot possibly overlook a lyric which will easily bear comparison with anything that Dowson or Symons has given us—*The Lake Isle of Innisfree*:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;  
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee,  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping  
slow,  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket  
sings;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day  
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;  
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,  
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

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The most important of Mr. Yeats's associates was, of course, Mr. George Moore. If we want to know all about Mr. Moore's career, and incidentally about the career of most of the men and women with whom he has been associated, we have only to turn to the first book of his new trilogy, *Ave*. He begins it by telling us how in 1894 he and Edward Martyn were living in the Temple, and how Martyn one night suddenly made what was, to Moore, the astounding proposal that they should write plays in Irish; and this appears to have been the first occasion when Moore was really made aware of the fact that there was a movement springing up in Ireland for the attempted resuscitation of Gaelic literature. Not long after—about 1899—Moore became more intimately associated with Yeats, and they were both among the founders of the Irish Literary Theatre.

I do not propose here to discuss in detail Mr. Moore's latest autobiography, for it has been published too recently to be germane to the purpose of this book. I cannot help saying, however, that it sets a decidedly new fashion in writing of this kind. It is pure Boswell, without Boswell's scholastic moments of eighteenth-cen-

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## GEORGE MOORE

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ture pseudo-classical stiffness and pedantry. Mr. Moore chatters gaily not only about himself, but about all his friends. No personality he ever met is too sacred to be dragged into his pages, and to have his weaknesses and good points, if any, artlessly set forth. I have said that the book is pure Boswell, and I may add that it is purely Irish in the best sense of the word. Mr. Moore takes us all into his confidence, shows his warm-heartedness and entire lack of affectation, digs us in the ribs, pats us on the back, laughs at himself, his friends, and his readers, and chuckles—we can hear him between the lines as he writes—when he has anything particularly wicked to say. I wish to quote one or two passages as illustrating Mr. Moore's style. There is quite a good one about Gill's beard. Gill's beard, it seems, was the origin of Gill :

At the end of a long convalescence, Gill had entered a barber's shop, his beard neglected, growing in patches, thicker on one side of his face than on the other. He fell wearily into a chair, murmuring, "La barbe," and exhausted by illness and the heat of the saloon, he did not notice for some time that no one had come to attend to him. The silence at last awoke him out of the lethargy or light doze into which he had slipped, and looking round it seemed to him that his dream had come true ; that the barber had gone : that he was alone, for some reason unaccountable, in

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the shop. A little alarmed he turned in his chair, and for a moment could find nobody. The barber had retreated to the steps leading to the ladies' saloon, whence he could study his customer intently, as a painter might a picture. As Gill was about to speak the barber struck his brow, saying, "Style Henri Quatre," and drew his scissors from the pocket of his apron. Gill does not remember experiencing any particular emotion while his beard was being trimmed. It was not until the barber gave him the glass that he felt the sudden transformation—felt rather than saw, for the transformation effected in his face was little compared with that which had happened in his soul. In the beginning was the beard, and the beard was with God, Who in this case happened to be a barber; and glory be to the Lord and to His shears that a statesman of the Renaissance walked that day up the Champs Elysées, his thoughts turning—and we think not unnaturally—towards Machiavelli.

Of course, there are also reports of various conversations with Yeats regarding Irish plays, some of which apparently must have reached maturity through a curious process. Yeats asks Moore to write a play in French. . . . "Lady Gregory will translate your text into English. Taidgh O'Donoghue will translate the English text into Irish, and Lady Gregory will translate the Irish text back again into English." And Moore, merely remarking that he relies upon Yeats to "put style upon it" after all this, actually sets about the task.

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Better than this, however, is the little vignette about the dinner when Yeats made a speech :

My eyes went to Yeats, who sat, his head drooping on his shirt-front, like a crane, uncertain whether he should fold himself up for the night, and I wondered what was the beautiful eloquence that was germinating in his mind. He would speak to us about the gods, of course, and about Time and Fate and the gods being at war ; and the moment seemed so long that I grew irritated with Gill for not calling upon him at once for a speech.

At length this happened, and Yeats rose, and a beautiful commanding figure he seemed at the end of the table, pale and in profile, with long nervous hands and a voice resonant and clear as a silver trumpet. He drew himself up and spoke against Trinity College, saying that it had always taught the ideas of the stranger, and the sons of the stranger, and the literature of the stranger, and that was why Ireland had never listened and Trinity College had been a sterile influence. The influences that had moved Ireland deeply were the old influences that had come down from generation to generation, handed on by the story-tellers that collected in the evenings round the fire, creating for learned and unlearned a communion of heroes. But my memory fails me ; I am disfiguring and blotting the beautiful thoughts that I heard that night clothed in lovely language. He spoke of Cherubim and Seraphim, and the hierarchies and the clouds of angels that the Church had set against the ancient culture, and then he told us that gods had been brought vainly from Rome and Greece and Judæa. In the imaginations of the people only the heroes had survived, and from the

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places where they had walked their shadows fell often across the doorways ; and then there was something wonderfully beautiful about the blue ragged mountains and the mystery that lay behind them, ragged mountains flowing southward. But that speech has gone for ever. I have searched the newspapers, but the journalist's report is feebler even than my partial memory. It seemed to me that while Yeats spoke I was lifted up and floated in mid-air. . . . But I will no longer attempt the impossible ; suffice it to say that I remember Yeats sinking back like an ancient oracle exhausted by prophesying.

Distinctly humorous, in its own way, is the reference to a pamphlet about "Arabi Pasha, an Egyptian rebel." This reminds me of the Roman history beginning with the words "Gaul was conquered by a man of the name of Julius Cæsar."

As a novelist Mr. Moore has professed himself to be a realist and particularly a follower of Zola. His long residence in Paris led him to the conclusion that the English language was no longer an apt vehicle for literary purposes, but although Mr. Moore writes in English his peculiar rippling, garrulous style has remained Celtic. It may seem curious that a professed realist should in later years have taken up an idealistic movement such as the Celtic revival is, and one can only suppose that Mr. Moore has long suffered from home-sick-



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ness, which may be intellectual as well as physical, or rather which may affect the head as well as the heart. A visit to Ireland after a long residence abroad, and Mr. Moore turned completely round. His novels are so well known that I need do no more than refer to the three most important—the conventual *Evelyn Innes* and its sequel *Sister Teresa*, books which are uncommon on account of their subject, setting, and atmosphere, but which have sold very well even in Protestant England. And then there is of course *Esther Waters*—a novel with a purpose, if you can imagine Mr. Moore writing such a thing. It is a book which sets forth the evils of gambling very powerfully and ends in a manner very nearly worthy of Gissing; but of course between the naïve Celt and the rather stern Wakefield scholar we cannot make any other comparison. *The Bending of the Bough*, written for the Irish Literary Theatre, may be passed over both for the sake of the reader's patience and Mr. Moore's reputation; but his book of art criticisms entitled *Modern Painting* (1898) is one of the best volumes he ever published. It is very often wrong-headed—Mr. Moore's opinion of Sargent, for example, can hardly be

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called modern. Many of his criticisms, however, are delightful, and here and there is a sentence which might be called artistically inspired. One of the best essays in it is that entitled *Royalty in Art*, for Mr. Moore deals with the influence of the British Royal Family on English artistic ideals. He mentions casually the support given to art by Julius II, Philip IV, Frederick the Great, and Charles II, and then he goes on to speak of the Victorian Exhibition. In the late nineties it needed no little courage to publish the extract which follows, though we must not allow our admiration for Mr. Moore's nerve to make us overlook the fact that his ideas are exceedingly well expressed :

Yes, truly the Victorian Exhibition is an object-lesson in royalty. If all other records were destroyed, the historian, five hundred years hence, could reconstitute the psychological characteristics, the mentality of the present reigning family from the pictures on exhibition there. For in the art that it has chosen to patronise (a more united family on the subject of art it would be hard to imagine—nowhere can we detect the slightest difference of opinion), the Queen, her spouse, and her children appear to be singularly bourgeois ; a staid German family congenially and stupidly commonplace, accepting a little too seriously its mission of crowns and sceptres, and accomplishing its duties, grown out of date, somewhat witlessly, but

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with heavy dignity and forbearance. Waiving all racial characteristics, the German bourgeois family mind appears plainly enough in all these family groups; no other mind could have permitted the perpetration of so much stolid family placidity, of so much "frauism." "Exhibit us in our family circle, in our coronation robes, in our wedding dresses, let the likeness be correct and the colours bright—we leave the rest to you." Such seems to have been the royal artistic edict issued in the beginning of the present reign. In no instance has the choice fallen on a painter of talent; but the middling from every country in Europe seems to have found a ready welcome at the Court of Queen Victoria. We find there middling Germans, middling Italians, middling Frenchmen—and all receiving money and honour from our Queen. The Queen and the Prince Consort do not seem to have been indifferent to art, but to have deliberately, and with rare instinct, always picked out what was most worthless; and regarded in the light of documents, these pictures are valuable; for they tell plainly the real mind of the Royal Family. We see at once that the family mind is wholly devoid of humour; the very faintest sense of humour would have saved them from exhibiting themselves in so ridiculous a light. The large picture of the Queen and the Prince Consort surrounded with their children, the Prince Consort in knee-breeches, showing a finely-turned calf, is sufficient to occasion the overthrow of a dynasty if humour were the prerogative of the many instead of being that of the few. . . . But why should not the Royal Family decorate its palaces with bad art? Why should it not choose the most worthless portrait-painters of all countries? Dynasties have never been overthrown for failure in artistic taste. I am aware how insignificant the matter must seem to the majority of readers, and should not have

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raised the question, but since the question has been raised, and by her Majesty, I am well within my right in attempting a reply. The Victorian Exhibition is a flagrant representation of a bourgeois, though a royal, family. From the beginning to the end the exhibition is this and nothing but this. In the entrance hall, at the doorway, we are confronted with the Queen's chief artistic sin—Sir Edgar Boehm. Thirty years ago this mediocre German sculptor came to England. The Queen discovered him at once, as if by instinct, and she employed him on work that an artist would have shrunk from—namely statuettes in Highland costume. The German sculptor turned out this odious and ridiculous costume as fast as any Scotch tailor. He was then employed on busts, and he did the entire Royal Family in marble. Again, it would be hard to give a reason why royalty should not be allowed to possess bad sculpture. The pity is that the private taste of royalty creates the public taste of the nation, and the public result of the gracious interest that the Queen was pleased to take in Mr. Edgar Boehm, is the disfigurement of London by several of the worst statues it is possible to conceive. It is bad enough that we should have German princes foisted upon us, but German statues are worse. The ancient site of Temple Bar has been disfigured by Boehm with statues of the Queen and the Prince of Wales, so stupidly conceived and so stupidly modelled that they look like figures out of a Noah's Ark. The finest site in London, Hyde Park Corner, has been disfigured by Boehm with a statue of the Duke of Wellington so bad, so paltry, so characteristically the work of a German mechanic, that it is impossible to drive down the beautiful road without experiencing a sensation of discomfort and annoyance. The original statue that was pulled down in the interests of Boehm was, it is true, bad English, but bad English

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suits the landscape better than cheap German. And this disgraceful thing will remain, disfiguring the finest site in London, until, perhaps, some dynamiter blows the thing up, ostensibly to serve the cause of Ireland, but really in the interest of art. At the other end of the park we have the Albert Memorial. We sympathise with the Queen in her grief for the Prince Consort, but we cannot help wishing that her grief were expressed more artistically.

I do not think I need ask to be excused for quoting Mr. Moore at such length: these remarks of his are quite as good as many things that Max Beerbohm wrote in *The Yellow Book*. Mr. Moore, however, has still much to do. He was born so recently as 1857, and although he has outlived contemporaries like Gissing, Wilde, Davidson and so on, much of his work is still to come. A final criticism on him would therefore be premature. It is worth noting that in 1903, after he had become connected with the Irish Literary Theatre, he renounced the Roman Catholic faith, it being stated that he did so on Celtico-national grounds. At present, however, he seems to be dissatisfied even with Ireland, and I am inclined to think that if he lives long enough he will graduate back to Paris and to the Roman faith. The effect of this on his work may be judged from what I have already said regarding the in-

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fluence on art of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.

When dealing with the Celtic revival, there are two names that no critic can afford to overlook. One of these is William Sharp, better known by his pen name of Fiona MacLeod; and the other is Mr. George Russell—not known by this name at all, but by his pseudonym of A. E.

William Sharp, whose parents were Scotch, was born in 1855, and died in Sicily in 1905 after a life which was marred by frequent illnesses. While he was still a young man ill-health drove him to Australia, though he spent much time in the Highlands, and he settled in London in 1878. Here he led a quiet life, meeting well-known writers like Rossetti, Browning, Pater, and Meredith, and also a few American luminaries, such as W. D. Howells. William Sharp, the critic and novelist, suffered from a particularly serious illness in 1886, in the course of which, as his wife tells us in a foreword to his collected works, he dreamed many dreams and saw visions. He put these dreams and visions into prose and poetical forms, and published them under the name of Fiona MacLeod. The first of these books was the volume entitled *Pharais*, issued in 1894. *The Mountain*

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## FIONA MACLEOD

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*Lovers* followed in 1895, rapidly succeeded by *The Sin Eater*, *The Washer of the Ford*, *Green Fire*, *The Laughter of Peterkin*, *The Dominion of Dreams*, and a volume of poems *From the Hills of Dream*. He also wrote two dramas, one of which, *The House of Usna*, was performed by the Stage Society, and his later books under the name of Fiona MacLeod included *The Divine Adventure* and *The Winged Destiny*.

All these works are thoroughly Celtic in spirit. Sharp himself thus describes *Pharais* in a letter: "I am writing a strange Celtic tale called *Pharais*, wherein the weird charm and terror of the night, of the night of tragic significance, is brought home to the reader (or I hope so) by a stretch of dew-sweet moon-flowers glimmering white through the mirk of a dust laden with sea-mist."

In a preface to the Tauchnitz edition of *Wind and Wave*, he explains his writings somewhat more fully. Some of them are tales of the old Gaelic and Celtico-Scandinavian life and mythology; others attempt to blend paganism and Christianity; and yet others are "tales of the dreaming imagination, having their base in old mythology or in a kindred mythopœic source. . . . Many of these tales are of

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the grey wandering wave of the west, and through each goes the wind of the Gaelic spirit which everywhere desires infinitude, but in the penury of things as they are turns upon itself to the dim enchantment of dreams.”

After this we may expect to find Fiona MacLeod's work of a dreamy description. If Mr. Arthur Symons interpreted moods for us in little gem-like poems, we may perhaps say that Fiona MacLeod interprets our dream moods. His peculiar gifts, it seems to me, may be seen to greater advantage in his poetry than in his prose, for stories about Gaelic mythology, mingled with dreams, have a tendency to become tiresome. In his poetry, however, he is a marvellously subtle interpreter. The following is from the volume entitled *From the Hills of Dream* :

In the secret valley of silence  
No breath doth fall ;  
No wind stirs in the branches ;  
No bird doth call :  
As on a white wall  
A breathless lizard is still,  
So silence lies on the valley  
Breathlessly still.

In the dusk-grown heart of the valley  
An altar rises white ;  
No rapt priest bends in awe  
Before its silent light ;



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## FIONA MACLEOD

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But sometimes a flight  
Of breathless words of prayer  
White-winged enclose the altar,  
Eddies of prayer.

The same book contains a section called *From the Heart of a Woman*. Every word in these poems is so delicately and carefully chosen as to remind us of Horace, and to quote from the longer ones would be, I fear, simply to spoil them. But there is a short one entitled *The Vision*, which is quite in Fiona MacLeod's manner :

In a far place  
Of whin and grass  
I heard feet pass  
Where no one was.

I saw a face  
Bloom like a flower—  
Nay, as the rainbow-shower  
Of a tempestuous hour.

It was not man, or woman ;  
It was not human ;  
But beautiful and wild  
Terribly undefiled  
I knew an unborn child.

Subtle interpretative poems like these must appeal to us like some of the best things in Symons or Dowson; or, to take another example, which is not so far-fetched as might

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be imagined, the Greek anthology. Daring indeed would be the critic who should venture to "comment" upon them. If any reader of Fiona MacLeod is gifted with the subtle poetical faculty necessary for the understanding of these poems, they will sink into the depths of his soul at the first reading and will never be forgotten. If, however, the reader is not moved by this graceful faery, dreamlike delicacy, it is greatly to be feared that no amount of learned exegesis will enable him to appreciate a man of Sharp's temperament. "I will set my face to the wind," he says in *The Divine Adventure*, "and throw my handful of seed on high." He has thrown his seed; what it produces will depend on the intellectual soil on which it has been cast.

While speaking of *The Divine Adventure*, I should like to put before the reader the dedication page of this book :

THE WIND, SILENCE, AND LOVE

FRIENDS WHO HAVE TAUGHT ME MOST :

BUT SINCE, LONG AGO, TWO WHO ARE NOT FORGOTTEN  
WENT AWAY UPON THE ONE, AND DWELL, THEMSELVES  
REMEMBERING, IN THE OTHER, I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO

EALASAI DH

WHOSE LOVE AND SPIRIT LIVE HERE ALSO.

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## FIONA MACLEOD

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There is one other volume of Fiona MacLeod's, however, from which, to do him full justice, I must give a couple of short quotations. Like so many other books by authors of the neo-Celtic school, it was apparently published for the first time by Mr. Thomas B. Mosher of Portland (Maine). It is to be regretted that less interest is taken in the movement in the countries of its origin than three thousand miles away. The volume I refer to is, of course, *The Hour of Beauty* :

The stars wailed when the reed was born  
And heaven wept at the birth of the thorn :  
Joy was pluckt like a flower and torn,  
For time foreshadowed Good Friday morn.

But the stars laughed like children free  
And heaven was hung with the rainbow's glee  
When on Easter Sunday, so fair to see,  
Time bowed before eternity.

Finally, what more exquisite conception of day and night could we have than the following ?

From grey of dusk, the vales unfold  
To pearl and amethyst and gold—  
Thus is the new day woven and spun ;

From glory of blue to rainbow-spray,  
From sunset-gold to violet-grey—  
Thus is the restful night re-won.

One of the most poetic of modern poets,

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and consequently in an age like the present one of the least read, is Mr. George Russell, a North of Ireland writer, who, as I have already stated, is best known under his pseudonym of A. E. In imagination, or better perhaps in fancy, he resembles Fiona MacLeod ; but he is less preoccupied with Gaelic or Celtic mythology. Few men have, in the higher, Nietzschean sense of the word, been more earthly : I do not like to use a more common expression and say that A. E. approaches close to nature, for this is a characteristic of bad painters. I need not, indeed, endeavour to explain what A. E.'s relations with the earth have been, since he himself has done it so well in the poem entitled *Dust* in that remarkable volume *Homeward, Songs by the Way* :

I heard them in their sadness say  
" The earth rebukes the thought of God ;  
We are but embers wrapped in clay  
A little nobler than the sod."

But I have touched the lips of clay :  
Mother, thy rudest sod to me  
Is thrilled with fire of hidden day,  
And haunted by all mystery.

A line or two from A. E.'s preface to this volume will also help to explain his poetical outlook :

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## GEORGE RUSSELL

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I move among men and places, and in living I learned the truth at last. I know I am a spirit, and that I went forth in old time from the Self-ancestral to labours yet unaccomplished; but filled ever and again with homesickness I made these songs by the way.

A. E. did, as a matter of fact, set out on a journey through Ireland to preach paganism, I know not with what results. As an interpreter of earth to man, however, I cannot think of any poet who can bear the slightest comparison with him. He sees as many moods in the earth itself as Symons does in man. He sees the earth breathing—one of his volumes indeed is entitled *The Earth Breath*. He sees the earth lying still and sleeping like some gigantic animal. As an exponent of this calm, hushed quietness he has soared to heights where no one has ever preceded or followed him. Let me take two more poems from *Homeward, Songs by the Way*, as instance of this :

Still rests the heavy share on the dark soil :  
Upon the black mould thick the dew-damp lies.  
A horse waits patient : from his lowly toil  
A ploughboy to the morning lifts his eyes.

The unbudding hedgerows dark against day's fires  
Glitter with gold-lit crystals : on the rim  
Over the unregarding city's spires  
The lonely beauty shines alone for him.

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And day by day the dawn or dark unfolds  
And feeds with beauty eyes that cannot see  
How in her womb the Mighty Mother moulds  
The infant spirit for eternity.

Earth lies at peace and no movement disturbs her calm. Yet a certain progress is being made all the time : the infant spirit is being prepared for eternity. Outside of the Vedas, where has this thought ever been better expressed ?

In this volume also is a magnificent little mood-poem entitled *Awakening* :

The lights shone down the street  
In the long blue close of day.  
A boy's heart beat sweet, sweet,  
As it flowered in its dreamy clay.

Beyond the dazzling throng  
And above the towers of men  
The stars made him long, long,  
To return to their light again.

They lit the wondrous years,  
And his heart within was gay ;  
But a life of tears, tears,  
He had won for himself that day.

The force of adulatory superlatives has long been weakened owing to the manner in which injudicious critics have scattered them over the ephemeral productions of modern novelists. Any words of praise, therefore, which I might

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shower on A. E. would be inadequate to convey to the reader a proper conception of his subtlety and vigour—of all his poetic gifts, in fact. It would be better to give a final specimen of his work, this time from *The Earth Breath*. The poem I have in mind is entitled *Janus* :

Image of beauty, when I gaze on thee,  
Trembling I waken to a mystery,  
How through one door we go to life or death  
By spirit kindled, or the sensual breath.

Image of beauty, when my way I go ;  
No single joy or sorrow do I know :  
Elate for freedom leaps the starry power,  
The life which passes mourns its wasted hour.

And, ah, to think how thin the veil that lies  
Between the pain of hell and paradise !  
Where the cool grass my aching head embowers  
God sings the lovely carol of the flowers.

It will, I think, be found that the writers with whom I have already dealt in detail have been the direct means of initiating some new movement, either in thought or in poetic form. Mr. Yeats, Mr. William Sharp, and A. E. may be said to belong to the same school, which includes even men so different from them as Mr. George Moore and Mr. J. M. Synge. Of this school, however, each of the writers referred to has formed a different branch.

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Entirely unconnected with them is Mr. John Davidson, a man who has formed a school all by himself, and remains, as yet, without followers—one might almost say without even sympathisers. John Davidson was nevertheless one of the most extraordinary poets produced by the last generation. He was a Scot, born in Renfrewshire in April 1857, and he had many of the characteristics usually associated with the Scottish intellect—a metaphysical bent and at the same time a great liking for physical science. He was buffeted about by the world from a very early age, for when he was only thirteen years old he was sent to Greenock to work in the unsympathetic and essentially prosaic atmosphere of a sugar factory. Afterwards he served in the office of the town analyst, and here he acquired a love for chemistry which always remained with him. He did not care for the work, however, and at fifteen became a pupil teacher. In the eighties he settled in London and produced a few dramas which included *Bruce, a Chronicle Play* (1886), *Smith, a Tragic Farce* (1888), and *Scaramouch in Naxos* (1889). A dainty prose romance, *Perfervid*, followed in 1891, but his career really begins with the publication of



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## JOHN DAVIDSON†

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*Verses in a Music-hall* in the same year, and *Fleet Street Eclogues* in 1893. The prose pieces which he published in 1894 and 1895—*Baptist Lake, Earl Lavender, and A Random Itinerary*—hardly concern us. The lover of something new and yet classical in literature will prefer to give his attention to books like *Ballads and Songs*, the second series of *Fleet Street Eclogues*, and *New Ballads*, published in the late nineties, and the remarkable series of *Testaments* which followed early in the present century, together with plays like *Mammon and his Message* and *The Triumph of Mammon*.

To deal with Davidson fully and the relation his poetry bore to the English culture of the period in which he lived would necessitate a large volume, and the writer of such a book would find it necessary to attack something very dear to the hearts of pseudo-cultured people of the present day, viz., the materialistic English science of the latter part of the nineteenth century. All I can do here is to sum up Davidson as concisely as possible. To begin with, then, he had the imagination of a true poet. Some of his descriptions and interpretations are conveyed to the reader with a delicacy and subtlety which we must pronounce

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to be little short of marvellous. We have but to read to the foot of the first page of *Fleet Street Eclogues* to come to four very distinctive lines :

From the muted tread of the feet,  
And the slackening wheels, I know  
The air is hung with snow,  
And carpeted the street.

This, however, appeared in one of Davidson's early works. As he grew older he became more and more preoccupied with science and religion. He was, if we may use the expression, the only honest atheist of his time ; he came to the definite, deliberate conclusion that religion had been outgrown—it was of no further value either for comforting human beings or for stimulating the imagination. With a logic which in the circumstances was truly admirable Davidson then put religion definitely aside and looked to science for the benefits which had hitherto been conferred on mankind by faith. The experiment was a tremendous one and could not have been made except by a man who possessed very high intellectual courage. In Davidson the extreme of scientific materialism was reached, and the pendulum began to swing back. With the publication of David-

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son's most scientifically inspired works in the early years of this century there came into prominence almost simultaneously two men, who, in matters of faith and a profound belief in God, harked back almost to the Middle Ages. I refer of course to Mr. Hilaire Belloc and Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in whom the humane instincts of the wide, all-embracing Roman Catholic Church were seldom seen to better advantage. They are not troubled with abstruse metaphysical or philosophical speculations about the "thing-in-itself," or the *Zeitgeist*, and the freedom which they enjoy in consequence is seen in the exuberance of their writings; but as they do not come into the period with which I am dealing it would be a digression to speak of them at greater length here. I should, however, like to add that both Chesterton and Belloc are not yet on a thoroughly safe philosophical or religious foundation, since it is in my opinion difficult for them to reconcile the rather Protestant, and consequently narrow form of democracy they profess with the aristocratic Church to which they both belong.

John Davidson, however, spent many years in endeavouring to secure a foundation for him-

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self, and when his life came to a tragic end in 1909 his work had not been fully accomplished. In addition to devoting himself to science, he made a profound study of the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, who left this Scottish admirer of his with one very definite opinion: that Christianity was the enemy—the enemy of art, of order, and of good government. Had Davidson realised that Nietzsche's severe criticisms of Christianity were directed against the Protestant rather than the Catholic form of the religion, the effects on his work might have been different. But he was too greatly pre-occupied with his scientific investigations to give any attention to this point.

When we consider Davidson's work in the mass, and especially his poetry and plays from the early nineties onwards, we must pronounce him to be a classicist—it is no exaggeration to say that even in his very features he showed traces of classicism. There will be few readers, however, who will not complain of the influence exercised over him by science, and made particularly clear in his later poems. His metre is often rugged and his sentences are often long, and even his female characters have a way of coming on the stage and referring in somewhat

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rocky blank verse to the chemical elements of which they are composed. As an instance of this scientific influence, let us take an extract from the introduction to the remarkable book entitled *The Testament of John Davidson* :

The principal constituents of matter, that is to say, of eternity, of the infinite, are carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen ; but these, with the other elements, consist of lightning, the first emergence of the ponderable from the imponderable. Lightning, with its poles or sexes, essence at once and seed and yeast, secreted in drops, or cells, or electrons the first limitation of matter, and began the fermentation in the eternal ether which was not to cease until the appearance of the invisible universe. No sooner had the drops, or cells, or electrons sprung from the tension of the dark, oblivious, omnipotent ether in eddying vortices than they sought an equilibrium, and combined themselves into groups, each group consisting of an array of negative and positive electrons, neutralising each other, and revolving about a common centre like a miniature solar system ; and this is the evolution of the atom. In each invisible atom tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or millions of cubic miles of the primal substance, which in its tenuous, imponderable form fills space, are constricted into the ponderable, garnered up and packed away ; every atom is thus a repository of the material of eternity and the fountain of all force—physical, mental, imaginative.

Towards the end of the dedication, Davidson appears to look upon himself as inspired in the same way as Nietzsche did when writing *Zara-*

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*thustra*, and he tells us, or rather the peers of England whom he is addressing, that matter is now the repository of the highest ecstasy and of all knowledge, adding, "This is the greatest thing told since the world began." The whole *Testament*, like all Davidson's later work, is impregnated with this scientific spirit. He tells us, for example, about taking his ease in heaven, "the first of men To be and comprehend the universe":

To know how all things are the infinite  
Imponderable ether that possessed  
Illimitable space with tension (pure  
Spontaneous energy, the pristine state  
Of matter and its last consummate doom)  
Before the galaxies with silver streamed  
The swart oblivion of the universe,  
Or pearly nebula began to glow  
Upon the sable bosom of the night.

Scientific this, with a vengeance. But if it be thought that Davidson was incapable of anything else, it may at once be said that we can match this scientific poetry with something much more delicate. Take, for example, the following from the volume entitled *Holiday*:

NOVEMBER: LONDON, W.  
Deep delight in volume, sound, and mass,  
Shadow, colour, movement, multitudes,  
Murmurs, cries, the traffic's rolling bass—  
Subtle city of a thousand moods!

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## JOHN DAVIDSON

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Distance, rumour, mystery, things that count,  
Bravely in the memory scored and limned !  
Sunset welling like a crimson fount  
Underneath the Marble Arch, o'erbrimmed

All the smoky west. In Oxford Street  
Lamps like jewels fallen by the way,  
While the sun upon his urban beat  
Bore the lofty burden of the day.

Or again, take this Nietzschean couplet from  
*Ballads and Songs* :

Unwilling friend, let not your spite abate :  
Help me with scorn, and strengthen me with hate.

Or those remarkable lines in *The Ballad of  
a Nun* :

I care not for my broken vow ;  
Though God should come in thunder soon,  
I am sister to the mountains now,  
And sister to the sun and moon.

As Davidson grows older we begin to note a comparison between him and Gissing. Both men were creative artists of a high order ; both were scholars ; and both were compelled to live in an environment which they regarded with the utmost dislike and dissatisfaction. In this respect, however, Davidson's feelings appear to have been, so to speak, wider than those of Gissing. Gissing, I think, would have been satisfied had his merits been acknowledged earlier, and had he thus been enabled to take

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his place in one of those upper strata of society in which he felt he had a right to a place—not, of course, that he had any social aims in view ; but simply because he felt that as a man of intellect he was entitled to move in the best society that London could afford him. Davidson, on the other hand, had an equal distaste for all classes of society, because he recognised clearly enough that from an artistic standpoint, every social grade, in England at all events, was uncultured. Gissing observed with sorrow that the cultured public was a small one, but in so far as I can judge from his works, and the few particulars we have of his life, he appeared unable to lay the blame for this state of things on any one in particular. He saw the fact and regretted it ; but he seemed to believe that no individual or group of people could be held responsible for it.

In this regard Davidson, as we see from his introduction to his *Testament*, held very definite views. He observed that the aristocratic class in England, once cultured, had gradually become less and less so, and he ascribed this degeneration to the right source, namely, Christianity—a point of view which I do not think would have occurred to him had Nietzsche not



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## JOHN DAVIDSON

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written. He then strikes the nail on the head at once by dedicating his book to the peers, and he makes a definite statement in the course of his remarks to the effect that the prestige of the House of Lords has been lowered through Christianity. Many other remarks of his in this dedication, such as his outburst against the "ruse, stratagem, and chicanery" of women, have obviously a Nietzschean root.

This dedication, despite its form, is an autobiographical document ; but not so direct, perhaps, as the personal note added by Davidson to *The Temple of Mammon* :

This book is published on April 11, 1907, my fiftieth birthday. Nine-tenths of my time, and that which is more precious, have been wasted in the endeavour to earn a livelihood. In a world of my own making, I should have been writing only what should be written. . . . For half a century I have survived in a world entirely unfitted for me, and having known both the heaven and hell thereof, and being without a revenue or an army and navy to compel the nations, I begin definitely in my Testaments and my Tragedies to destroy this unfit world and make it over again in my own image.

With this bitter preliminary Davidson proceeds to discuss poetry and the lives of poets, and in the midst of quite an artistic harangue we meet sentences like the following : "Light

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is matter, and sound, being isomeric with light, is also matter. . . . Sound and light are one and the same."

It has been urged against Davidson that his poems smack too much of science, and it must be admitted that there are passages which verge upon the ludicrous owing to the author's insistence upon chemical formulæ or new theories as to the origin of the universe. There is, however, no reason why aristocratic science should not be treated poetically. In the later period of Latin literature there was another poet who, like Davidson, was largely influenced by science, and whose poem, although one of the noblest ever written, deals almost exclusively with various branches of science. No one has ever complained of Lucretius, however, that he was too scientific, merely because he was capable of producing such lines as the following :

Fulgit item, nubes ignis cum semina multa  
excussere suo concursu ; ceu lapidem si  
percutiat lapis aut ferrum : nam tum quoque lumen  
exilit et claras scintillas dissipat ignis.  
Sed tonitrum fit uti post auribus accipiamus,  
fulgere quam cernant oculi, quia semper ad auris  
tardius adveniunt quam visum quae moveant res.  
Id licet hinc etiam cognoscere. Caedere si quem  
incipiti videas ferro procul arboris auctum,

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## JOHN DAVIDSON

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ante fit ut cernas ictum quam plaga per auris  
det sonitum : sic fulgorem quoque cernimus ante  
quam tonitrum accipimus, pariter qui mittitur igni  
e simili causa, concursu natus eodem.

I cannot permit myself to take up further space here by drawing an extended comparison between Davidson and Lucretius. A long comparison could nevertheless be made without much difficulty, and it would, I think, prove a fascinating one. They had one other bond in common in that they both committed suicide while still in the prime of life. Davidson, who was worthy of his great predecessor, was like him an honest atheist—a man who had cast aside an unsuitable religion, and turned to science for inspiration. In both cases the experiment was worth making, and in both cases the man who made the experiment was a poet of the highest order.

And now our survey of the last generation of English literature gradually approaches its conclusion. We have still to mention a poet who was important in his own particular circle, Francis Thompson ; and a scholar and critic whose failings lean to the side of generosity, Mr. W. L. Courtney, who, when criticising the productions of modern hack-writers and pseudo-

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## ENGLISH LITERATURE

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creative artists, too rarely dips his pen in vinegar.

Francis Thompson was born in Preston in 1859, and, after spending part of his youth in commerce, settled in London. He was never, of course, fitted to be a shopkeeper or a tradesman, and he would probably have passed an even more miserable existence than he actually did if he had not fallen in with a few believers in his poetry who did their best for him—the Meynells in particular. Thompson was fortunate in one respect. His first volume fell into good hands for review, and Coventry Patmore in the *Fortnightly*, H. D. Traill in the *Nineteenth Century*, and Mr. J. L. Garvin in the *Newcastle Chronicle*, praised him highly. Arthur Symonds, too, extended his congratulations later on in the *Saturday Review*: “He had no message, but he dropped sentences by the way, cries of joy or pity, love of children, worship of the Virgin and the Saints, and of those who were patron saints to him on earth. . . . Other poets of the time have had deeper things to say, and a more flawless beauty; others have put more of their hearts into their song; but no one has been a torch waved with so fitful a splendour over the gulfs of our darkness.”

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## FRANCIS THOMPSON

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Like most of Mr. Symons's criticism, this is to the point. Francis Thompson was a nineteenth-century Crashaw, with rather more fervour and a more delicate sense of language. He was a Catholic mystic, and set out, as Mr Coventry Patmore has told us, to exploit the inexhaustible and hitherto almost unworked mine of Catholic philosophy. In this respect one of Thompson's most characteristic pieces—one of the best poems, in fact, that he ever wrote—was the celebrated ode *The Hound of Heaven*, with those fine introductory lines which are not yet sufficiently widely known :

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days ;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years ;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
    Of my own mind ; and in the mist of tears  
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.  
    Up vistaed slopes I sped ;  
    And shot, precipitated,  
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,  
    From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.  
    But with unhurrying chase,  
    And unperturbèd pace,  
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,  
    They beat—and a Voice beat  
    More instant than the Feet—  
    “ All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

If this religiosity forms one side of Thompson's poetical character, the delicate way he

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has written about women forms another. *Sister Songs* and *Love in Dian's Lap* contain passages which are almost perfect. In the latter section I quote a few lines from the poem entitled *Her Portrait* :

Yet I have felt what terrors may consort  
In women's cheeks, the Graces' soft resort ;  
My hand hath shook at gentle hands' access,  
And trembled at the waving of a tress ;  
My blood known panic fear, and fled dismayed,  
Where ladies' eyes have set their ambuscade.  
The rustle of a robe hath been to me  
The very rattle of love's musketry.

And there is that eerie ending to *A Fore-telling of the Child's Husband*, in *Sister Songs* :

Now pass your ways, fair bird, and pass your ways,  
    If you will ;  
    I have you through the days.  
    And flit or hold you still,  
    And perch you where you list  
    On what wrist,—  
    You are mine through the times.  
I have caught you fast for ever in a tangle of sweet rhymes.  
    And in your young maiden morn,  
    You may scorn,  
    But you must be  
    Bound and sociate to me ;  
With this thread from out the tomb my dead hand shall  
tether thee !

*To a Snow-flake* shows Thompson in another vein :

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## FRANCIS THOMPSON

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What heart could have thought you ?—  
Past our devisal  
(O filigree petal !)  
Fashioned so purely,  
Fragilely, surely,  
From what Paradisal  
Imagineless metal,  
Too costly for cost ?  
Who hammered you, wrought you,  
From argentine vapour ?—  
“ God was my shaper,  
Passing surmised,  
He hammered, He wrought me,  
From curled silver vapour,  
To lust of His mind :—  
Thou could'st not have thought me !  
So purely, so palely,  
Tinely, surely,  
Mightily, frailly,  
Insculped and embossed,  
With His hammer of wind,  
And His graver of frost.”

Need it be added that Thompson, too, suffered from poverty, and that autobiographical fragments like the following are occasionally to be found through his poems ?

Forlorn and faint and stark,  
I had endured through watches of the dark  
The abashless inquisition of each star ;  
Yea, was the outcast mark  
Of all those heavenly passers' scrutiny ;  
Stood bound and helplessly  
For Time to shoot his barbèd minutes at me ;  
Suffered the trampling hoof of every hour  
In night's slow-wheeled car ;

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Until the tardy dawn dragged me at length  
From under those dread wheels ; and, bled of strength,  
I waited the inevitable last.

Then there came past

A child ; like thee, a spring-flower ; but a flower  
Fallen from the budded coronal of Spring,  
And through the city-streets blown withering.  
She passed—O brave, sad, lovingest, tender thing !—  
And of her own scant pittance did she give,

That I might eat and live :

Then fled, a swift and trackless fugitive.

Francis Thompson's prose writings include *Health and Holiness* : " a study of the relations between Brother Ass, the Body, and his Rider, the Soul." This almost reminds us of St. Francis, whose life, indeed, that of Thompson resembled in some respects. Books on Shelley and St. Ignatius Loyola also came from his pen ; but it is as a poet that his name will endure.

Mr. W. L. Courtney is known to us as a writer on philosophical subjects, as a dramatist, and as a literary critic. I think, however, that it is above all as a scholar that he will be remembered. There are scholars and scholars, and Mr. Courtney is what I am inclined to call, for want of a better expression, a creative scholar. He corresponds in a measure to Wilde's ideal creative critic. He reminds us in Letter 17 of *Rosemary's Letter-Book* that



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## W. L. COURTNEY

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beautiful things are not only difficult to create ; they are difficult to understand. " And this is a thing which is not always realised, even by those critics who claim to be interpreters. The burden which a great man lays on his contemporaries is the effort to comprehend what he means." It seems to me that Mr. Courtney has kept this well in mind in what is, in my view, his best work—that little volume entitled *The Idea of Tragedy*. It is here rather than in works such as *The Literary Man's Bible*, *The Feminine Note in Fiction*, and *Dramas and Diversions*, that Mr. Courtney's literary gifts are seen to advantage. It is, I think, regrettable that he oscillated for some time between creative work of the kind I have referred to and the critical work to be found in his earlier books, such as *Studies New and Old*, *Studies at Leisure*, and *Studies in Philosophy*. True, *Studies at Leisure* contains one of his best essays, that on *Personality* ; but in his philosophical outlook Mr. Courtney has always been rather too Kantian for modern tastes. This book, *Studies at Leisure*, was published in 1892, and contains another essay, one on Anatole France, which I think was what Nietzsche would have called too "English"

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## ENGLISH LITERATURE

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even for 1892. Certainly we have now passed the stage when Dickens, Scott, and Thackeray could be ranked high as creative artists. The essay in *Studies in Philosophy* entitled *Back to Kant*, and that in *Studies at Leisure*, entitled *Socrates, Buddha and Christ*, will give us a very fair notion of Mr. Courtney's philosophic outlook at the time. It is a pity that he was ever attracted by Mill sufficiently to write about him.

These, however, are early literary sins, and they were expiated by the publication in 1900 of *The Idea of Tragedy*. Since then Mr. Courtney has fortunately given less attention to metaphysics and ethics and more to creative work, but his later writings, such as *Rosemary's Letter-Book* and *In Search of Egeria*, occasionally jar on one because of what might be called their philosophic Whiggism. In *Rosemary's Letter-Book*, nevertheless, Mr. Courtney was the first critic of any standing to do justice to Miss Maud Allan's dancing, and in Letter 16 of the same book there is a comment on a certain aspect of modern writing which is so apposite that I shall take the liberty of quoting it :

The main characteristic of that which appeals to the present generation, whether in novels or in poetry

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## W. L. COURTNEY

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—in drama also, and to some extent in essay writing —is a certain crude and harsh violence, a desperate desire to produce an effect, and to produce it in such a masterful fashion that the nerves tingle with the strain. Take the four volumes of the collected works of William Ernest Henley, of which I am mainly interested in the poetic portion. Take the novels of the successful writers—men like Joseph Conrad, Edwin Pugh, Arthur Morrison—the man who wrote *Tales of Mean Streets*—the essays and discussions of Bart Kennedy ; some of the writings, too, of H. G. Wells. There is also, over and above these, the work both in poetry and prose of Rudyard Kipling—the swash-buckler of genius. Heaven knows how much these writers differ from one another in their ideals, in the quality of their writing, in the nature of their talents, as well, doubtless, as in their popularity. But I think they exhibit one common quality. They are rough and passionate ; they strike masterful blows ; they exhibit unrestrained emotion ; they paint with a big brush. I cannot imagine any of them writing with a quill pen ; they probably use typewriters and fountain pens—all the modern appliances for saving labour and urging a mad career without stint or pause. The French adjective *criard* represents the effects they produce—gaudy, melodramatic, showy, creating conviction by their unblushing intensity, never winning their way by sweet reasonableness, but forcing us to agree with them at the point of their literary pistols. That is what I mean by the note of violence. At its best it is called “smart” and “spirited.” At its lowest and worst it belongs to that region of “twopence coloured” which everywhere contrasts with the modesty of “penny plain.” And meanwhile let us ask ourselves what are the essential attributes of the literary art, such as were fixed once and for all by the classical models we owe to the

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## ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Greeks. Two things above all. Serenity and reserve—in other words, the quality of restraint, the dislike of the crude and the morbid, the keeping oneself well in hand, the artistic limitation which prevents unreasonable display.

Mr. Shaw will no doubt be interested in that remark about the typewriter. To judge from one of his complaints in *The Sanity of Art*, he has evidently never been able to get a machine that can work quickly enough to satisfy him.

Mr. Courtney's chief fault, as I have intimated, is the fault of generosity and good-nature. There are some writers, such as Mr Wells, whom he has praised a great deal more than they deserved. Added to this is his philosophical conservatism—the desire to uphold that school which is typified in Kant as against the school typified in Nietzsche. Nor is he in many cases altogether free from traces of sentimentality, and an acute critical passage like that which I have just quoted is often liable to be found in what I should personally regard as a somewhat uncongenial setting. Despite these shortcomings, however, Mr. Courtney's wide range of scholarship, and the creative use to which he puts it, apart altogether from

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## L. BINYON—ST. JOHN HANKIN

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the interest he takes in humanity, and the appeal humanity makes to him, entitle him to be called a man of letters in the fullest sense of the expression.

There are one or two others who deserve mention. In looking through the works of Mr. Laurence Binyon I have found only two lines in *London Visions* which I care to quote, and I regret to say that I have been forestalled by Mr. Blaikie Murdoch, who naturally pounced upon them also and put them into his book on *The Renaissance of the Nineties* :

Come, let us forth, and wander the rich, the murmuring  
night!

The shy, blue dusk of summer trembles above the street.

Seldom has a poet evoked more delicately something which it is impossible to describe.

Mr. St. John Hankin has left us a few specimens of drama which appeal to me more than anything so far written by Mr. Galsworthy or Mr. Granville Barker. In his *Three Plays with Happy Endings* (*The Return of the Prodigal*, *The Charity that Began at Home*, and *The Cassilis Engagement*) he exhibits a desire to touch upon sexual or sociological problems, as he also does in his *The Last of the De Mullins*, but in every case he is saved from morbidity

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by a strong sense of humour which makes him give a "turn" to the action of the piece which would not occur to Mr. Shaw or to Mr. Barker. In the preface to the *Three Plays*, Mr. Hankin declaims against the conventional happy ending. His plays do end happily, but not in the sense in which the expression is used by the average dramatic critic. People who should get married, and who would get married in the ordinary play, simply become lovers for awhile, and then part, because it is better for them to do so. *The Prodigal Son* ends happily—for the son. Mr. Hankin may be accused of cynicism; but if we admit this, we must add that it is merely the cynicism of common sense which has distinguished men of the world like Machiavelli, Napoleon, and Disraeli. Apart from his plays Mr. Hankin is probably best known by the thin volume of *Lost Masterpieces*. These parodies are almost all excellent, but that on Robert Browning is particularly good. Significantly enough for those interested in the psychology of the period, Mr. St. John Hankin, like Davidson, came to a sad end. It is not so very long since he committed suicide in his chambers.

Mr. Richard Le Gallienne naturally belongs

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## RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

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to this period also, but his place in it is never destined to be very high. His work is to the work of Dowson or Symons as paste to a flawless jewel. The amorous adventures he recounts in *The Quest of the Golden Girl* are, to speak frankly, rather tiresome. They ooze sentimentality, and the sentimental ending is dreadful. Nor is the book which he published much later, *Little Dinners with the Sphinx*, any better in this respect. In short, Mr. Le Gallienne cannot be called an artist, though there have been occasions when by consciously or unconsciously imitating poets like Dowson, he achieved a result which may be called passably artistic—such things, for example, as the four lines entitled *Natural Religion* in *An Elegy on Robert Louis Stevenson and other Poems* :

Up through the mystic deeps of sunny air  
I cried to God, " Oh Father, art Thou there ? "  
Sudden the answer like a flute I heard ;  
It was an angel, though it seemed a bird.

There are one or two little things like this scattered through Mr. Le Gallienne's writings which will not irritate, even if they do not greatly please, the fastidious ; but, unfortunately, they are rare. Single-speech Hamilton was wise in never making a second experiment.

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## ENGLISH LITERATURE

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One more name, and I have done. No book of this kind would be complete without at least a reference to Mr. R. B. Cunninghame Graham. Known to the world at large chiefly as a Socialist who took part in a celebrated demonstration in Trafalgar Square in 1887, Mr. Graham is known to the few who read as a man of wide travel and culture, whose book on Morocco, *Mogreb-el-Aksa*, was a literary event. Little less interesting did we find his *Vanished Arcadia*, a history of the Jesuits in Paraguay, and the reprinted articles and sketches in the volume entitled *Success*. Few men know Spaniards and Spanish-speaking countries more intimately; few have described them better. Unfortunately, Mr. Graham sometimes leaves literature for politics, and then he sinks. The clever writer of such pieces as *The Evolution of a Village*, or *Might, Majesty, and Dominion*, becomes an early-Victorian Whig when he criticises King Alfonso or apologises for Ferrer. Still, in a sterile age such as the present, a good deal can be forgiven a man who often equals Shaw in directness, and Max in the happy knack of combining bitter irony with quite unusual politeness.



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## CONCLUSION

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It was an interesting period, and it is not safe to prophesy what will follow it. As always, there will be a few of us to judge books on their artistic merits alone, and there will be a few artists, unknown to the outside world, who will write, as Gissing did, for a small public. But, so far as the great public is concerned, English literature of the next few years will, it should seem, be dominated by the novel; and most of the novel writers will follow the models of Mr. Wells. Shaw, now having become a popular dramatist, will doubtless influence the theatre, particularly through the one-act play. I cannot see at the moment any signs of successors to Dowson and Symons. Crackanthorpe's tradition may be carried on; but so-called realists should remember that realism is not confined to the seamy side of life—a fact which Crackanthorpe himself too often overlooked. In the course of the next few years Nietzsche will beyond all doubt become a potent force in England, as he has long been on the Continent, and with his further study here critics, it is to be hoped, will come to recognise the sharp distinction between aristocratic and democratic literature: form characterising the first no less than absence of

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form characterises the second ; the one being art, and the other pseudo-art. The age of science may be dead ; but we must look to it that if an age of faith is to begin such faith shall be aristocratic—Catholic, if you like—and not the narrow Puritanism and Nonconformity to which we have so long been accustomed. Only if this condition is fulfilled shall we witness anything resembling a renaissance in creative English literature. This is an essential principle ; and the leaders of such modern literature as we have—if I may use an expression verging on the colloquial—must be educated up to it.

“Educate educators,” says Nietzsche. “But the first educators must educate themselves : and it is for these that I write.”

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